

What do you think of when I say the following words: Judge, judgment, judgmental, “judgy”? You may think of a court of law and the sentence passed down when found guilty. You may think of the mental process of evaluating and discerning, or you may have a visceral, personal reaction to those words because you’ve experienced the pain of someone overstepping, speaking critically, and condemning you without really knowing you. All of these are relational, personal, and intense, and they add complexity to our relationships inside and outside of the Kingdom.

In our world today, we live in this strange dichotomy of not being able to point to any behavior and say it’s wrong. It’s called tolerance but really what’s demanded is acceptance and approval, but if it’s not given, condemnation is given in return. But is that how it’s supposed to go in the Kingdom? Are we to exercise judgment at all? Some have the “nunya” philosophy. As in it’s nunya business and whatever a person does is only between them and God. Others say yes and take it upon themselves to be the spiritual police. Jesus would tell both sides they are wrong. If we are going to live with this greater level of righteousness he calls us to, it’s going to require the proper judgment of what that looks like, and require the help of God and one another to get there. Jesus is going to show us how that’s done and not done.

**[Matthew 7:1-5] “Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup> 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? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.**

So far the Sermon has laid out Kingdom standards and asked us to evaluate ourselves. Jesus now addresses how we engage one another in pursuit of the new standard of righteousness. He begins with one of the most misunderstood and misused passages in the New Testament. Many see “Judge not” as meaning have no view, opinion, or evaluation of any behavior in my life. It is used most often by those living far from God as a defense mechanism to prevent anyone from speaking into their life. You can tell when someone is serious because they go all King James: “Judge not lest ye be judged” or say it so fast you can barely understand what they are saying.

But that’s not what Jesus is saying. **He’s called us to live in a way totally different than the world and to do that we need to be discerning, exercise judgment, to evaluate our lives and help others evaluate theirs.** What Jesus is telling us to avoid is being overly critical, reveling in the searching for and calling out of other’s sin, taking the position of authority by condemning, and not only seeing actions and attitudes, but knowing what’s going on in someone’s hearts.

I remember speaking with a lady a few years ago and anyone that came up in our conversation she would say “Well, you know that...” and say something negative about their character and behavior. She had an inventory of wrongdoing on everyone, and her implied verdict was guilty. She was one of the most unappealing people I’ve ever met in my life. That’s what Jesus is telling us to avoid.

When we play judge, we set ourselves up as the righteousness expert, we decide we have someone figured out, and declare a verdict about them. But someone already has that job, and his name is Jesus, so when we do it, there are consequences.

First, if we live a life of judging, God will judge us. Every one of us is a sinner in need of God's grace. We are as guilty as everyone else. But the day you trusted in Christ is the day God declared you "not guilty". Jesus wants us to extend that same grace and mercy to one another.

Second, whatever standard we hold others to, they will hold us to that same standard. You want to put the bar impossibly high for others, you'll be expected to clear it yourself. It's the dynamic of "whataboutism" so prevalent in political commentary today. "Yeah, but what about your guy. He did \_\_\_\_." **When we judge unfairly, we'll be held to the same standard.**

Third, it ignores our shortcomings. **The more eager you are to find fault in others the less likely you are to see your own.** And oftentimes what we see in others is what we don't like about ourselves. Jesus uses the imagery of eyes. We are really good at seeing the speck in someone else's eye but really bad at seeing the log in ours. I remember one of my college football coaches always lecturing us about not using tobacco, but he'd often do it with a giant cheek of chewing tobacco. It wasn't a very effective strategy. Jesus is calling out that hypocrisy.

Do you struggle with this? Have you considered why? Maybe it's a blind spot. Maybe it's a defensiveness that comes out of your shame. If you are critical, explore where that is coming from. And more generally, what kind of spiritual assessment do you put yourself through? Do you take your own sin seriously enough that you want to identify it and root it out? Do you ask God to search your heart, reveal where you are off, and lead you to repentance and confession? Jesus wants you to start there, not only for you, but for others.

Fourth, **if we ignore our own shortcomings, we won't be very good at discerning others.** We'll be blinded by our own sin/log that we'll struggle to accurately see what's going on in someone else's eye. And that's a problem given what Jesus calls us to in v5. It's here that Jesus makes clear **we have a sacred responsibility and privilege to help one another live as faithful Kingdom citizens.** None of us are asked to do this alone, and as we are restored by God, we'll be in a position to help others experience the same. Who better to help someone struggling with sin than the one who has just experienced God's grace and forgiveness?

So then how do we do that? I love that Jesus uses the example of the eye. It's a reminder that we are to do this gently. There is no black robe and gavel pronouncing judgment. It's a brother or sister lovingly engaging someone else who is in a vulnerable position. It's why Paul says **[Galatians 6:1] Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.** We are among souls as sensitive as an eyeball, and we are to handle with care.

I also love that Jesus uses this imagery because think about what you have to do to really help someone with their eye. If anyone said to you "Can you help me see if I have something in my eye?" What do you have to do? Get close. This kind of engagement is not something we do from

afar, do with the unfamiliar, do in passing. We have to get close to that person, know intimately what is going on in their lives, and engage graciously and lovingly to help them along.

Who is your eye doctor? And who do you have to help? Church is a team sport. Our mission begins with “Calling each other” That’s why we encourage everyone to be in a Life Group because we all need biblical community to do this right. But we’ll also experience that some don’t want our help.

**[Matthew 7:6] <sup>6</sup>“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.**

Jesus says not everyone wants what we are offering. He again uses vivid imagery of dogs and pigs, both of which are detested by the Jews. John Calvin says these are “Those who have a(n incurable) hardened contempt of God.” They are not open to the gospel or our critique or correction. We need proper judgment to evaluate who these people are and know how to respond because, while we may think we are being faithful to the Kingdom by witnessing and pointing out what is true, our persistence may do more harm than good.

I will never read the *New York Times*. It’s not because of a particular bias or even their toxic culture that came to light this year. It’s because of a salesman. I got a call 15+ years ago, back when we used to answer our phones, and it was a guy selling subscriptions to the newspaper. He made his pitch, I said no thanks, but he didn’t take that no for an answer. He kept on, and I politely kept telling him I was not interested. I was trying to be so good, so Christian! But I finally had enough and said “Dude, I’m trying to be polite here. I’m sure most people hang up on you by now. I’m not interested.” You want to know what his response was? “I can save you 30% if you subscribe today.”

We may think we need to keep after anyone and everyone, but Jesus says use your judgment because that’s not always true. Sure, we may suffer for our faith, but if we are so persistent with the gospel that it becomes antagonistic and the cause of someone wanting to attack us, we’ve gone too far. **What might be a “no thanks” in the moment suddenly becomes a never.** Be open with your faith. Engage others with the gospel. But if they have been given a fair hearing and are still resistant, move on. Even Jesus told the disciples to do that and shake the dust off their feet. We have that same freedom, and it leaves more time for God to draw that person in.

So Jesus has told us to use judgment around ourselves, others in the Kingdom, and those opposed to it. It all sounds good, but where does that judgment come from?

**[Matthew 7:7-11] <sup>7</sup>“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup>Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!**

Jesus returns to a theme of prayer. Some believe these verses are a prayer for us to pray for all of what Jesus has discussed. Others think it's about vv1-6. Regardless, it works here. We will not be very good at what Jesus has just asked us if we try to do it in our own power. Our helping others will be more like a poke in the eye. We need divine grace, and Jesus says it's available.

Jesus wants us to know we can pray with confidence and approach God boldly. I have, at times in my life, been sheepish in my prayers. I don't want to bother God, I'm afraid to ask for big, bold things, I'm not sure he's listening. But what did we see a couple weeks ago? What we know about God determines how we pray. So Jesus is telling us who he is. A loving Father eager to hear and answer our prayers with good gifts for his children. And Jesus says that if sinful, earthly fathers can give good gifts to their children, imagine what a perfect Heavenly Father gives. When we ask in faith, he gives. When we seek in faith, he shows. When we knock in faith, he opens. Jesus doesn't say he'll give us whatever we ask for. God uses his judgement in determining what's best for us, and that's why they are good. If it's not good for us, he won't give it. But if it is, he's eager to give it. So then what are we to ask for? The corresponding passage in Luke gives us a clue.

**[Luke 11:13] <sup>13</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

What do we receive through the Spirit? Power, wisdom, cleansing, forgiveness, discernment, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control. Could you use those gifts as you seek to take the log out of your own eye? Could you use those gifts God as you engage a brother or sister with their sin? Could you use those gifts to know how to engage someone hostile to the Gospel? God is so generous. He has no interest in us doing any of that on our own. **Take a risk in your prayers this week.** Pray big, pray bold, pray for God to use you mightily, and ask him to give you all you need for that to happen. He's listening!

**[Matthew 7:12] <sup>12</sup> "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.**

It's almost like Jesus taught all this, looked around, saw there were still some questions or blank faces, and said "OK. Let me sum it up for you. Think about how you want to be treated and do that for everyone else." It's what we know as the Golden Rule, and it also requires proper judgment. As we determine how we ourselves want to be treated, Jesus says do the same for everybody else. The simplicity of Jesus' rule always astounds me because when you think about it, it makes perfect sense. How would I want to be treated if I were struggling with sin? Do the same for others when they are struggling. How would you want to be treated if you had no interest in something someone was offering? Do that for others who are saying "No thanks". How do we want God to treat us when we pray? Be that gracious to others. If you live like that, things are probably going to turn out ok.

So let's leave the judging work to the Judge. God has not asked us to do that. He's asking us to use the judgment he gives to love others well as we all pursue the righteousness of the Kingdom together.