

Upside-Down Kingdom: And When You Judge
Growth Group Discussion
Matthew 7:1-6

Opening Question (get everyone involved in discussion):

- Can you think of a time when you felt unfairly judged? What was that experience like?
- Begin with prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to lead your discussion.

Discuss:

- In this week's sermon, Andrew Barber mentioned the "Stanford Prison Experiment." This experiment showed a human tendency to believe that "I/we" are good, and the "other/they" are bad. Where are some examples that you see this tendency at work these days?
- One danger of this tendency is that it keeps us from doing deep reflections about ourselves, because to do so means we must give up moral superiority. What is "moral superiority," in your own words? Why is it so hard to give up?
- How does the gospel of Jesus enable us to give up moral superiority and do honest reflection about ourselves?

Read Matthew 7:1-6, and then discuss the following.

1. Verse 1 is one of the most-quoted verses of Scripture in our culture. Why do you think it is so popular?
 - What Jesus is not saying:
 - Andrew argued that Jesus is *not* saying to give up your critical faculties. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
 - He also said that Jesus is *not* giving permission to "live and let live." Do you agree? Why or why not?
 - What kind of judging *is* Jesus cautioning against? Why is it so dangerous?
 - Why would we be unwise to conclude that someone is condemned, or beyond the reach of God's grace?
 - Andrew said, "Because we will stand before the judgment throne of God, we have to live our relationships in the light of eternity." How does the reality of our own future judgment impact how we think about other people now?
2. On Sunday, we heard the following explanation of Jesus's words here: "if your posture is one of forgiveness of others, you are inviting the same from God. If your posture says, 'I'm right and all others are wrong,' you're setting yourself up for judgment."
 - Take an honest look at your life. Do you tend to default to criticism of others? Are there certain situations or relationships where this is true?
 - Andrew told the story of a man who set a bear trap, and ended up catching himself in it. How is the posture described above akin to setting a trap for ourselves?
 - How could your posture toward others be changed by reflecting on the gospel? (See Romans 5:6-10).

3. In vv. 3-5, Jesus gives very practical teaching about how we offer correction or advice to others.
 - Does Jesus say that we are never to help someone see a fault in his/her life?
 - What do you think it means to deal with the “plank” in your own eye before trying to help someone else with the speck in their eye? What kind of posture does this suggest for us?
 - Dallas Willard suggests that the “plank” to which Jesus refers is a condemning spirit. If this assumption is correct, how would a condemning spirit keep you from being able to help anyone else with their issues?
 - How does dealing with your own “plank” then make it possible to help another?
 - Does this teaching have anything to say about the way in which we *receive* a rebuke or criticism?
 - Andrew suggested that if social media or news routinely bring you to a feeling of self-righteousness or contempt for others, you might consider giving it up. Do you think this suggestion would be helpful to you?

4. Jesus’ words in v. 6 are puzzling. Andrew suggested that “pearls” represent the truths of the gospel, which we try to share with other people. In the same way that pigs have no interest in pearls—in spite of their great value—some people will have no interest in the truths of the gospel. As a result, we are to stop spending effort on them—trusting the Holy Spirit to be at work—and spend it on people who are more open to the gospel.
 - In what way did Jesus do this in his ministry?
 - Are there situations you are currently facing where this advice would be helpful?
 - How do we navigate the tension between Jesus’ instruction here, and his instruction above about not judging? Are the two contradictory?

Big picture summary: Live as people who will stand before God’s throne. Don’t be surprised when you fail. Know that you sin in ways you don’t recognize. You are accepted because of Jesus, therefore be humble before God and other people. Love as he loves. If you need to rebuke, do it in humility. Trust the Spirit when there are people against the gospel. Do it all in light of what Jesus has done for you.

PRAYER:

- Pray for one another with respect to what has been shared in your discussion, as well as any other needs that exist in your group. Allow for a time of humble confession, if people have acknowledged a tendency toward pride or self-righteousness.
- Pray for our new Discipleship Pastor Search Team, as they begin to seek God’s leading.