

## Why Is This a Favorite Verse?

Matthew 7:1-6

There are some people who know very little about what the Bible actually says, but who seem to know one specific Bible verse very well. They use that verse to justify themselves, to defend their own particular actions, as they try to avoid the sense of their own guilt and the consequences of God's judgment upon their sin. That verse is the first verse of our text this afternoon, Matthew 7. "Judge not, that you be not judged."

The situation is something like this. They are living with some particular sin, indulging and permitting the sin as if nothing was wrong. But they are defensive, wanting your approval because they still feel some pangs of guilt. But they will not repent. They will not stop sinning, and they are irritated or even angry at you because you aren't telling them it's OK. So the mere fact that you believe that their actions are sinful, causes them to conclude that you have judged them. So they try to put you off, and declare to you with some defiant rebelliousness, "Judge not, that you be not judged."

In our culture, it is assumed that no one has the right to make any judgments about anyone else. Stop judging me, we are told so often! You have no right to judge me! And so we are encouraged NOT to be judgmental. Or perhaps it is phrased, "Don't be so harsh." "Don't be so rigid." The popular idea is that you have no right to conclude or to believe that someone else's actions are sinful. You are not allowed to be judgmental, and your willingness to make any negative judgment about the actions or behavior of anyone else is just about the only thing that can rightly be judged by others as a sin. After all, the Bible says, "Judge not, that you be not judged."

People of God, that is,

## I. A WRONG USE OF A BIBLE VERSE.

Matthew 7:1 is not written to give a sinful person freedom to indulge in sin. It is not given to protect a sinful person from a faithful and godly rebuke. This verse is not written in a vacuum. It is not written as if verse 2 didn't exist. Or verse 5. Or verse 6. Judgments are made in each of those verses, and verse 1 does not express the fullness of Jesus' teaching. So we need to be careful to avoid that error of taking a verse out of its context and allowing it to exist and be understood without the Bible's own interpretation. Scripture interprets Scripture. The Bible is its own best interpreter. And never is that principle clearer than in this case.

The obvious observation just from this text is that,

### **A. Jesus does not prohibit every and all judgments made by his people.**

Indeed, verse 2 gives the right and proper explanation for verse 1, and the point is that there are times when you will pronounce judgment.

v.2

That's not a prohibition of all judgments, but a restraint against false judgments. Likewise,

v.5

There's the main point of the passage. Prepare yourself so that you will be able to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

So the point of the verse is not to give someone who is caught in sin a quick and easy answer to avoid your rebuke, but just the opposite.

Gal. 6:1 "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

The idea of the word “restore” is that of a physician setting a broken bone. Putting the broken bone back into place. And you and I are called to do just that for one another. Similarly,

Rom. 15:14 “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”

You are “able to admonish one another.” To correct, verbal admonition, sometimes translated instruction, with the idea of correction. All of those things require a judgment, don’t they? A judgment of sin in the life of a brother or sister in Christ. And, of course, the church, through her Elders, must make those judgments as a matter of duty and responsibility. As Paul writes in,

1 Cor. 5:9 “I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. 12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

So judgments are to be made, and the defining essence of the membership of the church is the willingness to submit to that spiritual oversight of the church,

Heb. 13:17 “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

A simple point, but necessary in the culture in which we live today. Jesus does not prohibit every and all judgments made by his people. And, even further,

## **B. Jesus calls his people to make a distinction between believer and unbeliever.**

Just look at,  
v.6

Now, even before we look at what that means, just note the judgment that is required. To make verse 6 make any sense at all, you have to be able to identify the dogs and the pigs! Unquestionably, the reference is to unbelievers, as both of those animals represent that which is most despised and utterly rejected by Jews. For example, we read,

Rev. 22:14 “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. 15 But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.”

Pigs would represent all that was ceremonially unclean to the Jews, representing all who are not among the people of Israel. Pigs and dogs. Symbolically, unbelievers. Certainly the final judgment will come and the eternal and unchangeable separation will be established at that time, distinguishing between those whom Jesus identifies as being on Jesus’ right or on his left. But here in Matthew 7, we are called upon to identify those two groups here and now. We are to make a distinction between believer and unbeliever, a judgment. In fact, the church itself gives evidence of that distinction, as only those with a credible profession of faith belong to the membership of the church.

So we make judgments, and in the context of verse 6, we are to keep the treasures of the gospel and the valuable treasures of

the faith within the protection of the church. That doesn't mean that you don't witness the gospel to unbelievers, but that the richness of Christian fellowship belongs to us as believers. And, there is a point at which even the invitation of the gospel is restrained. As one commentator puts it, "A moment arrives when constant resistance to the gracious invitation must be punished by the departure of the messengers of good tidings."

For example, Jesus' words in,

Mat. 10:11 "Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. 12 And when you go into a household, greet it. 13 If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. 15 Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"

So, at a certain point, "shake off the dust from your feet." At a certain point, even the invitation of the gospel becomes a precious pearl that is thrown to the pigs. "Do not give what is holy to the dogs."

As a further example, that means that we restrict the Lord's Supper to those who believe. That means that the fullness of the warmth of our affections are given only to those who believe. That means the riches of our spiritual experiences, our delights in answered prayer, really any blessing we enjoy from the good hand of God's providence, all of those things are to be enjoyed by Christians within the blessing of our Christian fellowship. So unbelievers are always welcome in our midst, but they remain outsiders with regard to the richness of our experience of God's graces.

We enjoy things together as Christians that we simply cannot share with those who do not believe in Jesus. With good reason. They will not only mock us, but far worse, they will mock those things we consider to be holy and blessed. What we enjoy together, in Christ, are identified as pearls. Precious, and beautiful. So we ought not to display all of our spiritual blessings in common view such that those who are unbelievers would use those very blessings as the occasion to mock and attack the faith we enjoy.

v.6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

So we do make judgments about others. What, then, is the right use of verse 1?

## **II. THE RIGHT USE OF A BIBLE VERSE.**

v.1

I'll let the Bible interpret itself in order to answer that question.

v.2

The point there is that,

### **A. We must accept the responsibility to judge ourselves.**

There is a simple principle of fairness and justice. The restraint is simple and obvious. The standard of judgment you use with reference to others will be applied to yourself. So it doesn't mean you must refrain from ever making judgments, but be prepared to apply the same standard for yourself.

So this warning is appropriate, as one commentator puts it, "the habitual self-righteous faultfinder must remember that he can expect to be condemned." So if you judge without mercy, you should expect the same judgment yourself. If you judge others harshly or unkindly, you may anticipate the same in return.

This was a particularly common problem for the Pharisees among the Jews, who thought so highly of themselves yet so quickly would condemn others. And the warning against hypocrisy is so appropriate for all of us. How easy it is to judge others while being hesitant and unwilling to examine yourself! How easy it is to be harsh in judgment, to be quick to judge, to be unfair in making judgments. And then being slow and inconsistent when looking at your own life.

I doubt that any of us can really ignore the whole of this warning. You must learn to accept the responsibility to judge yourself. To examine yourself. And to confess your own sins.

David's words are so appropriate as a genuine and sincere prayer for every one of us,

Ps. 139:23 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."

The warning and invitation to the Lord's Supper includes this same idea of self-judgment.

1 Cor. 11:27 "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world."

People of God, learn to judge yourself. Learn to examine yourself. And be willing to do it. Above all else,

## **B. We must reject the hypocrisy of refusing to see the sin in ourselves before we see the sin in others.**

Here is the focal point of Jesus' teaching. The words are so plain. The point is so clear.

v.3-5

The contrast is between a speck and a plank, and how easy it is to see the speck while missing the plank. Sometimes translated a log. How easy it is for the hypocrite to notice the least, smallest fault or sin in someone else, when there are glaring and obvious faults in your own life. Surely, that is hypocrisy in its worst form. And that hypocrisy frequently becomes the focal point of Jesus' rebuke.

Luke 18:9 "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Beloved, beware this danger. Beware the danger of hypocrisy. Beware the dangers of being critical of others when you are unwilling to be aware of your own faults. Beware of finding fault in others, being offended by what you identify as sins in others, when there is a beam in your own eye! And please be willing to consider your own faults with the image of beam, a log, while you consider the faults of others with the image of a speck. In other words, minimize the faults you see in others while you

maximize your own self-judgment. That, I believe, has much to do with Paul's restraint which I read earlier in,

Gal. 6:1 "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

There are other dangers associated with this sort of hypocrisy. The danger of putting prejudice in the place of principle, making judgments about others in terms of your own prejudice. Often, it can be the tendency to put personalities in the place of principle. In other words, what bothers you about others is not really sin, but a different personality. Or a matter of Christian freedom, a matter in which Christians can legitimately differ. Even worse, is the propensity to make judgments about others without a knowledge of all the facts, a willingness to be offended or to point out a fault in someone else while not knowing or understanding the whole of the situation, unwilling to exercise mercy or recognize mitigating circumstances. Just judgment, black and white, finding fault out of a speck while a log or beam remains in your own eye.

Hypocrisy is such a dangerous element to introduce to the fellowship of a church body. The self-serving willingness to think too highly of yourself, while at the same time being quick to find fault with others, is devastating to the health and life of a congregation of God's people.

So consider your own heart, and your own tendencies. Ask yourself to consider whether or not either or both of these tendencies belongs to you, the tendency to be overcritical of others and the tendency to be slow to grasp or admit your own faults. If you find it easy to be aware of the sins of others while too often unaware of your own faults, then ask God to examine your own heart. "Search me, O God, and know my heart!"

Let me put the same thing in a positive light.

1 Cor. 13:4 "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

1 Peter 4:8 "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

So love one another. People of God, love one another. Esteem others more important than yourself. Consider others before you consider yourself. And with that love, be willing to admonish one another, instruct and correct one another, restore one another. But always, always, with gentleness, remembering this, "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."