



Part 13 – Specks, Logs, and Good Judgment

Matthew 7:1-6

The Sermon on the Mount is a sort of membership charter in the Kingdom of God. That is, Jesus is teaching his disciples what it looks like to be a citizen in God's kingdom. He is not giving a prescription for how sinners may be justified before God which comes about only by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Rather, Jesus is describing how those who are justified ought to live. In this final section

of the sermon Jesus focuses specifically on how his disciples are to relate to others in a way that is in keeping with the values of His kingdom.

What Jesus is NOT saying...

Vs. 1a – “Judge not...” – Jesus is most certainly not telling us to suspend all good judgement or cease discerning sin from righteousness and truth from error. Indeed, the Sermon on the Mount is filled with instructions to judge the errors of others in order to avoid them. Jesus tells us not to pray “as the Gentiles do” (6:7) or fast “like the hypocrites” (6:16). Our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees (5:20). Indeed, in the present text, Jesus follows his command against sinful judgmentalism with a call to respond with proper judgment to those he compares to dogs and swine (vs. 7). As Stott observes:

“Our Lord’s injunction to ‘judge not’ cannot be understood as a command to suspend our critical faculties in relation to other people, to turn a blind eye to their faults, to eschew all criticism and to refuse to discern between truth and error, goodness and evil.”¹

What Jesus IS saying...

Vv. 1 – “Judge not, that you be not judged.” – The word Jesus uses translated “judge” (*krino*) carries with it the idea of condemnation. And that is the way in which Jesus is using it. Elsewhere Scripture is very clear that the use of our critical faculties is good and necessary for the health of the church. We are to make value-judgments based upon the Word of God. Obviously, Jesus is not condemning proper value-judgments. He is not forbidding Christians from identifying sin as sin. “This passage is concerned with the fault-finding, condemnatory attitude which is too often combined with blindness to one’s own failings.”²

Vs. 2 – “For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” – It is not entirely clear in verse two whether Jesus is referring to the judgment we will receive from God or the way in which we will be judged by others. However, the latter is most likely. As we interpret Scripture with Scripture we know, for instance, that God has already judged our sins in his crucified Son. That said, perhaps Jesus is referring to the fact that our works will be judged in the final judgment (**1 Cor. 3:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:10**). However, I think it is most likely that Jesus is telling us that sinful judgmentalism tends to be responded to in kind. As France observes, “The least that such an attitude can expect is to be judged with equal harshness by other men.”³

However, it may be that there is a deeper spiritual significance to the warning as well. The Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor reminds us that the harsh, condemning heart likely reveals one who is himself under the condemnation of God (**Matt. 18:23-35**).

In commanding us to not judge, Jesus makes his meaning quite clear by illustrating the principle with an absurd image of a man with a log stuck in his eye busily trying to remove a speck from another man’s eye.

Vv. 3-5 – “[3] 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? [4] 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? [5] 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.”

¹ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, TBST (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1978) p. 175

² R.T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 142

³ France, 142

Vs. 5a – Jesus refers to this judgmental man with the term “hypocrite.” A hypocrite is one who lives with sinful inconsistency. There is a wide gulph fixed between what he claims to believe and how he actually lives. Certainly it is true that no Christian lives in perfect harmony with their confession. So what Jesus has in mind here is a person whose hypocrisy is so much a part of them that they don’t even recognize it. And that is the point of his absurd illustration of a man who does not even see a log fixed in his own eye. He has a massive fault which blinds him to everything he does but he can’t even recognize it.

“First take the log out of your eye...” – The hope is that repentance is possible. There is a remedy for the hypocrite.

Vs. 5b – “...then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” – Notice that Jesus does not deny that the brother has something in his eye which needs to be removed. Nor does he deny that we are to help our brothers and sisters remove their fault. “The hypocrite’s error is not in his diagnosis, but in his failure to apply to himself the criticism he so meticulously applies to his brother.”⁴

Vs. 6 – “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.” – Here we have further evidence that Jesus is not advocating for an undiscerning approach to sin and error. Jesus identifies a sort of person with language that would be frowned upon by most evangelicals today. The sort of person Jesus has in mind is the one who treats what is holy as though it were filth.

“Pearls” – The “pearls” that Jesus mentions here seem best to be taken as the gospel that his disciples will be proclaiming. Elsewhere Jesus compares this message to a pearl that is worth selling everything else to obtain (**Matt. 13:45ff**). The gospel is a precious treasure. It is a holy thing and ought to be treated as such, not as garbage to be thrown to dogs.

Jesus’ words here are not to be taken as an injunction against evangelizing the lost! That would contradict the mission of the church. Jesus will soon be sending his disciples out into the world for the sake of proclaiming the gospel. Rather Jesus is warning us against spending too much time trying to persuade scoffers who will take our proclamation of the gospel and use it for an occasion to blaspheme our Lord and his grace. Later Jesus will instruct his disciples that when their message is stubbornly refused, they are to shake the dust from their feet as an act of judgment against them and move on (**Matt. 10:14**). Paul, who was willing to forsake his own inheritance in heaven for the sake of the salvation of his fellow Jews, finally walked away making the Gentiles his primary audience (**Acts 13:44-46**). Of course this calls for careful discernment. I suspect that what Jesus is describing here will be, for most of us at least, a pretty rare occurrence.

What Jesus is forbidding: *Indifference and Hypocrisy*

The two things that turn proper judgment into sinful judgmentalism are indifference, which is lack of love, and hypocrisy in which proper discernment turns into blind self-righteousness. Indifference will always avoid correcting sin and error. Hypocrisy becomes a hammer disguised as discernment used to bludgeon others.

What Jesus is commanding: *Love and Discernment*

Jesus is not calling for a balance between love and discernment as though they were competing interests. Love and discernment are not two extremes which require a third way in between. Genuine love is discerning and godly discernment is loving.

Remember your Judge

Being reminded of our responsibility to judge with wise discernment and to repent of all hypocrisy must cause us to consider that God is the ultimate righteous Judge and that each of us are accountable to him. “Knowing God as Judge has a sanctifying and restraining influence on our lives. In particular, it has the effect of making us pursue holiness of heart and life more rigorously. God’s position as Judge teaches us to be stricter with ourselves...But at the same time, an awareness of God as Judge teaches us to be merciful, and gentle with others.”⁵

⁴ France, 143

⁵ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1987) pp. 130-131