

Matthew 7:1-6

Since Matthew 5:1, Jesus has been demanding that all those who enter the Kingdom of God must exhibit true righteousness in their lives; however (unfortunately), humans easily deceive themselves. The more we do or the more righteous we feel, the greater the tendency to look down upon others in disdain. Any progress made becomes just another road that ends in hypocrisy. Therefore, Jesus warns about this hidden danger.

7:1-2 -Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

Jesus' words "Do not judge" are well known, but are often misapplied and understood to mean "I have no right to say what someone is doing is wrong"¹ or a "Who are we to judge?"

"These words of Christ do not contain an absolute prohibition from judging, but are intended to cure a disease, which appears to be natural to us all" (Calvin) - the desire to esteem ourselves and belittle or criticize others.

The Greek word "judge" has two nuances; to judge can mean to discern between good and evil, or it can mean to be unjustly critical of others. The Bible often exhorts people to exercise proper discernment (Jn.7:24; I Cor. 5:5; Gal. 1:8,9; Phil. 3:2; I Jn. 4:1). Paul tells us to exercise discernment in Galatians 1:6-9, when he informs us that if somebody comes and preaches another gospel, let him be accursed. John tells us that if anybody talks about a Christ other than the Christ of the Bible, we are not to receive him into our home or even greet him (II Jn.1:9-11). We are told to remove those who are sinning from our midst (I Cor. 5:4-9). Hymenaeus and Alexander were put out of the church because of the corruptive influence they had upon it (I Tim. 1:20). We are commanded to test every spirit (I Jn. 4:1), and to know the difference between good and evil. In fact, throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has asked that this kind of judgment be exercised. We are told to love others in a way that is different from the Gentiles (Matt. 5:43 ff.) - that involves comparing our love to theirs. Furthermore, the commands to beware of false prophets and not to "give what is holy to pigs" (Matt 7:6 ff) cannot be obeyed unless one exercises discernment.

So in verse 1 Jesus cannot be forbidding the exercise of discernment unless He is contradicting Himself; rather, He is forbidding a judgmental spirit, or a critical, condemning attitude toward others (Gal.6:1-5; Ro. 14:1-12). Warnings about this abound in Scripture: John 7:24; Luke 16:14-15; 18:9; Ro. 2:1-8, 17-24 are a few examples.

The person who judges in this way usurps the place of God who alone is judge. "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand." (Ro.14:4).

Elsewhere Paul said, "But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment

before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God." (1 Cor. 4:3-5).

James also spoke about this. In James 4:11-12 he says, "Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?"

We sit in judgment on other people's ministries and other people's teaching and other people's life and other people's attitudes all the time. Every time you criticize somebody because they don't do something the way you think it ought to be done, or because you think you've figured out their motive, you pass judgment and set yourself up as God.

It is the person who wants to act like God who will in turn be judged by God.

The person who is judgmental testifies to his own arrogance, thus shutting himself off from God's forgiveness (as in 5:7; 6:12, 14, 15). "For example, suppose we condemn someone for lying. If we use a perfect standard of justice we will be very condemning. In turn that standard will be applied to us. How honest are we? The question we all need to ask is: do we really want God's standard of justice applied to us as strictly as we apply it to others?" (Carson)

When we judge others we are displaying an erroneous view of ourselves. We think that we are somehow different than everyone else, or that we are able to live at a higher standard, or we act like we are in the place of God being able to read the motives of the heart. Jesus goes on to an extreme illustration (hyperbole) to express the monstrous inconsistency of this conduct.

7:3-5

3 "Why do you look at 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,' and behold, the log is 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."

"We are unfit judges, not only because we are fallible and we can't play the part of God, and because we are partial in our own favor and tend to think we have a different standard than everybody else, but because we are hopelessly and utterly blind when it comes to perception." (MacArthur)

Romans 2:1-6 says, "Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that

you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS”

Romans 2:17-23 “ But if you bear the name "Jew " and rely upon the Law and boast in God, and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? ”

“If you're negative, gossipy, tale bearing, critical, judgmental, you're under the false illusion that you're exempt from judgment. For whatever you condemn in somebody else, you prove that you should be condemned for in your own life by virtue of such knowledge. Criticism then becomes a boomerang. You throw it out and it comes right back. And unloving criticism will recoil on your own head at the hand of God.” (MacArthur)

This does not mean that we are to just ignore a sinning brother or offer them no help. Paul said, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted (Gal. 6:1). In other words, we are still responsible to remove the speck from our brother’s eye, but it's wrong to offer to if we still have the plank in our own. II Samuel 12:1-12 is a dramatic example of this (also see Lk. 18:9).

Among Christians, critics are not needed. But when someone is humble and judges himself first (I Cor. 11:31), thus removing the plank from his own eye, he then has the responsibility to help remove the speck from his brother's eye (18:15-20: al.6:1). Indeed it is only under such conditions that a brother will welcome help.

7:6 - "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

The opposite danger of being judgmental (7:1-5) is to be indiscriminating. The disciple of Christ is told to love his enemies and to pray for those who persecute him (5:44), as well as to be non-judgmental (7:1-5). As a result he faces the new danger of being indiscriminating. The scenario Jesus gives to illustrate this truth is a man offering riches and sacred things to animals.

The dogs in Jerusalem that roamed the streets in packs in search of food were filthy and often diseased. For a Jew to offer something sacred to such an animal would be horridly profane. Likewise, the pig was considered to be the epitome of uncleanness. No Jew ever tried to domesticate the pig, so they, like the dogs, ran wild foraging for food in garbage dumps at the edge of town. Though someone may mean

well, to offer pigs pearls would be a great lack of discernment, for the pigs would simply trample them under foot. Pigs have no capacity to appreciate the value and beauty of pearls, nor can dogs revere that which is holy.

In non-metaphorical terms, Jesus appears to be saying this: The gospel of the Kingdom is sacred and of immeasurable value (13:44). Yet all men will not receive it as such. Some will be hostile toward it and mock it. Some "are so thoroughly imbued with a wicked contempt of God, that they refuse to accept any remedy" (Calvin). Efforts to proclaim the gospel to such men is not only futile; it's foolish. Though we should love such people, pray for them, and desire their salvation, we should not waste our time proclaiming the riches of God's truth to them (Prov. 9:7-9).

Some possible examples of those whom Jesus is speaking of may be found in Matt. 10:14; 13:11-15; I Peter 2:1-3; II Peter 2:12-22.

Acts 18:4-6 tells of Paul's preaching and the Jews' rejection of his message. It says, "And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

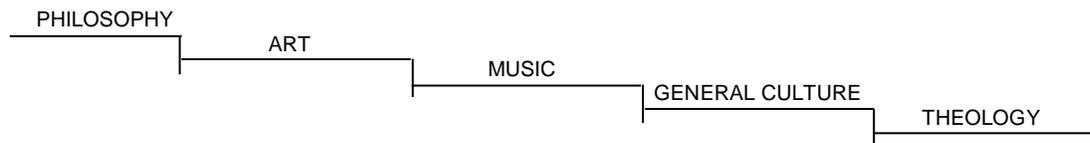
To avoid the extremes in verses 1-5 and verse 6 is a difficult task. We must always be charitable and kind, yet guard ourselves. We must not be critical toward others, and yet we must know men's character, and deal with them accordingly. Our goal is to live in accordance with the norms of the kingdom in every situation we face. Such a task can seem overwhelming, so we are encouraged to put childlike trust in God throughout our pursuit. Our only hope of victory is through the persistent prayer spoken of in the following verses.

END NOTES:

¹To properly understand the Bible we must see each verse in its cultural and historical context. In other words, any interpreter of ancient literature is trying to discover how each word and sentence was understood by those who read it in their own language at the time it was written. After the original meaning is understood, the underlying principles can be applied to our life context. Although this is basic methodology, it is rarely considered by the average Bible reader who treats the Scriptures as if they had just been penned in twenty-first century English. This results in people inserting a twenty-first century mindset back into a historical and cultural context where it didn't exist (the common misunderstanding of Matthew 7:1 mentioned above is a case in point).

A CHANGING WORLD

Shifts in society usually take place gradually. They begin in the realm of philosophy, then they work their way through art and music, then culture in general, and finally filter into theology. This progression can be diagrammed as follows (Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 16):



This flow of philosophy into culture influences the way the average person reads the Bible. It is therefore imperative that we are aware of the cultural influences around us. Some significant ideas in American culture that commonly color the way we read Scripture are pluralism, relativism, and tolerance. Though the meaning of these terms is debated, the following may help to explain some of the changes that have taken place in the thought processes of pop culture.

PLURALISM, RELATIVISM, TOLERANCE

Pluralism is a social fact. It simply means that there are many different and opposing beliefs, cultures, values, morals, customs, etc. that exist. In America, pluralism is also the recognition that those who differ from you have a right to their difference, even if you disagree.

Relativism is a philosophical belief system used to evaluate or interpret pluralism. Relativism says that since we are all finite and since we have no standard or criterion to measure truth by, no one should presume to know more than anyone else. Therefore, it argues that there is no such thing as absolute truth but that all truth is subjective and constantly changing, so every point of view in a pluralistic society is equally valid.

“Practically speaking, the only truth is that there is no truth, or at least no objective access to that truth. . . We are all confined to our own ideas of what is right or wrong, true or false. But whatever our conclusions may be, they are merely our opinions, and our opinions are no better than those of another.” (Michael Patton)

Therefore, relativists conclude that it is naïve or arrogant to say that we know the truth or that those who disagree with us are wrong. “The only “wrong” that we are likely to commit, according to the relativist, is to condemn or judge the beliefs of another. This is a failure of openness, caused by ethnocentrism and bigotry” (Dick Keyes).

Relativism expresses itself in many ways. When people say, “That may be true for you” or “it doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you believe” they are expressing a belief in relativism; namely, that “truth” is an individual matter not an objective fact. In this understanding it is possible for us to have contradictory beliefs and both of us be correct. In Christian circles I often hear relativism expressed when people say things like “That is just *your* interpretation!” or “What this verse *means to me* is . . .” The first comment assumes that interpretation is just opinion; the second is the belief that a verse’s meaning is whatever you think it is. In both cases the underlying assumption is that no one has the right to challenge what I think because every view is equally valid.

“Tolerance is living side by side with others who have real and deep differences with us, but living with respect and civility in our personal attitude, and as much as is possible, in public policy.” (Dick Keyes).

“But in reality, this is not what typical postmoderns (the people of our generation) mean when they cry for “tolerance.” They are not asking people to simply tolerate and get along with the opposing belief. The fact is that they are asking people to compromise their beliefs. They are asking me to concede that my neighbor’s beliefs are just as true as mine, to forfeit my notion of objectivity, and to surrender my view of exclusivism” (Michael Patton).

A number of observations should be made:

1) The present concept of “tolerance” is not coherent, for in order to tolerate something you must first disagree with it. But if we live by the assumption that there is no absolute truth and all differences are equally valid; the question then becomes what are we tolerating?

2) Pluralism has always existed, but how it is approached varies from age to age. In the age of modernism (1900-1950?), differences introduced by a pluralistic society led to robust discussion, for it was believed that through the process of debate the truth would eventually surface. Tolerance was directed toward the individual; people tolerated *people* whose beliefs they disagreed with.

But a major shift has taken place in the age of post-modernism (our age). Tolerance is no longer directed toward the individual, it is directed toward the belief. Tolerance doesn’t simply mean accepting the right of a person to hold opposing opinions; it means that we must accept that their beliefs are equally true as our own. In other words, we must forfeit the right to believe that there are absolute truths in order to be considered tolerant.

In the end, the postmodern idea of tolerance is actually less tolerant than the tolerance under modernism. Instead of respecting the individual and disagreeing with their beliefs, under the new tolerance the *individual* who believes that there are absolute, timeless truths is immediately labeled as a naïve, arrogant, ethnocentric bigot (see below), and the doors for discussion close. Liberal Tolerance is neither liberal nor tolerant” (Beckwith).

3) In reality, relativism has become a totalitarian system that claims to be the only absolute truth with which to interpret all other systems of thought.

All of this has huge ramifications for the Christian faith.

Francis Beckwith writes,

“Liberal Tolerance is perhaps the primary challenge to the Christian worldview current in North American popular culture. . .

Liberal tolerance is grounded in *relativism*, the view that no one point of view on moral and religious knowledge is objectively correct for every person in every time and place. This notion, as understood and embraced in popular culture, feeds on the fact of *pluralism*, the reality of a

plurality of different and contrary opinions on religious and moral matters. Against this backdrop, many in our culture conclude that one cannot say that one's view on religious and moral matters is better than anyone else's view. They assert that it is a mistake to claim that one's religious beliefs are exclusively correct and that believers in other faiths, no matter how sincere or devoted, hold false beliefs. Thus, religious *inclusivism* is the correct position to hold.

Liberal tolerance is not what it appears to be, however. It is a partisan philosophical perspective with its own set of dogmas. It assumes, for instance, a relativistic view of moral and religious knowledge. This assumption has shaped the way many people think about issues such as homosexuality, abortion rights, and religious truth claims, leading them to believe that a liberally tolerant posture concerning these issues is the correct one and that it ought to be reflected in our laws and customs. . . .

Liberal tolerance is a sham. Although portrayed by its advocates as an open, tolerant, and neutral perspective, it is a dogma whose proponents tolerate no rivals. Those of us who are concerned with presenting and defending our faith in a post-Christian culture must be aware of this sort of challenge, one that masquerades as open, tolerant, and liberating, but in reality is dogmatic, partisan, and coercive.

Although the Christian worldview is marginalized in our culture and considered dangerous by some, we cannot lose our confidence. After all, this is God's universe, and He has made human beings in His image. We must be confident that when we unpack these undeniable notions that are "written on our hearts," those who unreflectively and unthinkingly dismiss our case really do know the truth as well (Rom.2:15). But this must be balanced with the knowledge that the human heart is incredibly wicked (Jer.17:9). This tension will remain as long as we attempt to defend our faith in a culture hostile to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus of Nazareth."

Dick Keyes adds some very insightful comments on this whole subject (the excerpts that follow are compiled from different papers he has written, so the continuity of thought is not as good as the original manuscripts):

"When considering relativism, I often think of the example of a lifeguard on a beach who has an elevated chair so he can look down over everybody and see what is going on. He has a perspective that nobody else on the beach has. Everybody else has his or her feet in the sand, cannot see beyond immediate neighbors. But the lifeguard has an elevated chair from which to see the whole beach. Relativism tells us that nobody has that elevated view when it comes to religion. Everybody is at ground level, with only his or her local perspective.

Relativism claims that we have a lot of people from different perspectives saying what they think ultimate truth is, but that these people are simply expressing their own beliefs. They are attempting to name what is not namable. Relativism claims that it does not make sense to talk about some religions being true and other religions being false; doing so brings the wrong categories to the discussion. To the relativist no religions are true or false. Certainly none are true in any way that would exclude any others being true. They are all true in that they do more

or less the same job; they express the deepest human longings and are means for achieving social cohesion; they help hold societies together and give them a sense of unity and common purpose.

Just as you would never say that vanilla ice cream is the only true ice cream and chocolate ice cream is false ice cream because you prefer vanilla, so also the relativist says you should never speak in such a way about your religious preferences. The issues of true and false have no place in the discussion.

Relativism 's Intolerance of Pluralism

Despite relativism's celebration of pluralism, in fact it does not even tolerate pluralism, except in this token and condescending way. Pluralism states that there is a plurality of religious and philosophical options. Relativism, rightly understood, argues that there is not in fact a plurality of ultimate truths at all, but only one single ultimate truth that explains all the other pretenders. One is left not with plurality, but with uniformity at the level of ultimate belief.

The relativist is a closet absolutist. You may have heard the idea that all religions are ways, or paths, up the same mountain. As these paths travel up the mountain the climber has no clue that there are actually other roads up the same mountain. When he finally gets to the top of the mountain and sees God, the person realizes that he was not on the only road at all, but that there are lots of people on their way to God by all sorts of paths or religions.

This mountain analogy sounds very humble and makes any people who disagree with it feel ignorant, small minded, and arrogant if they think that their road is the only road. But the real question to ask is – where is the person standing who is describing this mountain? He or she must be in an airplane in order to see the whole mountain. Why is the relativist the only one who gets to have an airplane when all others sweat and trudge up their roads in ignorance?

The relativist is not just giving us a lovely picture of openness. *The relativist is giving one exclusive model to understand all the religions of the world. Relativism is an over-religion or a meta-religion that forces all religions into its mold. It sounds humble and willing to admit the fallibility of human knowing, but it produces a single vision of ultimate truth that excludes all other contenders . . .*

Relativism denies pluralism, the idea that there are different options that differ substantially from each other. Relativism actually destroys pluralism. It homogenizes all differences so they are seen as basically the same. In the relativist's own illustration, pluralism is represented by these poor people struggling up the road on the mountain, all of them in the same ignorance about what they are doing.

Think of what this means for specific religions. For instance, the Christian faith affirms a belief in a personal God. Buddhism denies a personal God. Relativism says that these two religions are really the same in their most basic convictions. This is a homogenizing process that obscures the real differences.

So, for the relativist all views are one view. All religions are paths to salvation. But here we must ask, what does salvation mean? The different religions have very different views of salvation. Which salvation gets to be the one that we are talking about? For Buddhism salvation is nirvana. The Buddhist finally leaves behind all his desires and even his experience of his individuality. Compare this to the Muslim view of salvation. At least for the hijackers of recent fame, it meant that they would be met by seventy-two dark-eyed virgins who would be committed to indulging their every desire.

Whose salvation are we talking about? Whose heaven? If you take the relativist line, you have got to acknowledge that we really cannot say anything about the nature of salvation because the moment a person does, that person has excluded somebody else's view. So the only thing to say is that we know nothing. But that does not get anyone very far. So salvation generically is defined as "enabling a truly moral life" or "keeping the forces of despair at bay." The intriguing thing is that those statements do not sound like they are coming out of any of the world religions but more like modern western liberal humanism forced onto the plurality of world religions.

Relativism refuses to be relativized

Confusion is guaranteed unless we realize that relativism works at two levels in many of our discussions. On the one level, it is a philosophical doctrine, one among other contenders. But on the other level, it is a meta-philosophy, telling us how to understand all doctrines from all sources. This explains why it can sound so humble one minute, as if only the relativist has taken human fallibility fully into account, but can sound so arrogant the next minute, as if the relativist alone has been granted a vision of ultimate truth. It is one view, but demands to be the paradigm through which all views are known.

...

As we have seen, the cutting edge of relativism's critique is to say that all ultimate religious and philosophical beliefs are properly understood not as possible sources of true knowledge about God or ultimate truth, but as only products of their culture's groping to name the unnamable. But at the same time, relativism claims for itself immunity from the force of its own critique. We are meant to believe that it alone is not just a product of the relativizing factors in its own (modern, Western, academic, tenure-seeking) culture, but that it is in some mysterious sense, objectively, timelessly true. It comes to us through an epistemological immaculate perception, whereby it miraculously escapes the acid bath of relativizing analysis. This is the "overbite" of relativism.

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Relativism is the real opiate of the people. It discourages serious discussion of the most important issues, and dampens the challenges of pluralism, enabling people to sleepwalk through the most important choices of their lives. The questions having to do with God's existence and character are no longer urgent, since they are matters not of truth, but only of private opinion and preference, and have no final consequence.

If, however, pluralism really does exist at the level of ultimate truth, then honesty dictates that we take that plurality seriously. In fact, there are differences in ultimate outlook that are difficult to deny. There is a difference between a God who is personal, a God who is impersonal, and the absence of God altogether. There is a difference between a final judgment after death, a series of many reincarnations, and simple cessation of consciousness. The cause of mutual understanding is not served by pretending that these are superficial or negligible differences.

Religious pluralism is nothing new. The start of the Christian faith was in the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire in the first century was possibly more pluralistic than modern America. It was more radically diverse in the different religious movements. The Christian faith, with its claims to Christ's uniqueness, grew and thrived exactly in that kind of setting. Pluralism in the modern world may surprise the church today, but it offers no new challenge to the Christian faith.

Ironically, there is a special relevance of the New Testament for us now in dealing with pluralism. Far from putting us in a new paradigm, pluralism puts us back into the first century, right into the setting of the book of Acts. Pluralism was exactly what the Apostle Paul was facing as soon as he stepped out the front door of a synagogue onto the main street of any gentile city."

http://www.labri.org/england/resources/05052008/DK01_Pluralism_Relat_3EF200.pdf

http://worldwidefreeresources.com/upload/Keyes_TheUniqueness.pdf