

JUDGING OTHERS

MATTHEW 7:1-6

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?

Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.

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.

One of my all-time favorite television commercials was done by Ameriquest Mortgage for the Super Bowl.

A man gets home from work before his wife. He plans to treat her to a delicious meal. He's been to the grocery, and has all the ingredients to cook spaghetti.

He even has fresh cut flowers for the table.

But as the sauce simmers on the stove, the couple's fluffy, white kitty jumps up on the counter top, and knocks off the pot of sauce. The cat falls into the spilt spaghetti sauce, which colors its fur a blood-like red.

The husband has been chopping lettuce, so as he reaches to clean up the spill, he's got a butcher knife in one hand, and his blood-red kitty in the other hand...

Just as his wife opens the door and sees him!

Actually why don't I just show you the clip...

Here is a loving, caring, thoughtful husband - *the envy of most wives*. He's cooking his honey dinner.

He should be rewarded for his love and initiative. Instead his wife thinks she's married to a cat-killer...

And the caption sums up the commercial's message, "Don't judge too quickly." In dealing with people we all should *be careful about jumping to wrong conclusions*.

That's why Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:1, "**Judge not, that you be not judged.**" How easy it is to draw the wrong conclusions about other people. We all tend to categorize, and generalize, and assume, and pigeon-hole, and stereotype, and fault-find, and sin-sniff.

We think we know the whole story - *but we don't...*

When we make judgments based on appearance, or when we assume we know another person's motive, we're making unfair and superficial judgments.

I don't care if you have perfect eye-sight, 20/20 vision, no one can see into another person's heart.

As Jesus said, "**Judge not!**" And why should you judge not? He tells us, "**that you be not judged.**"

When you make assumptions and draw ill-informed conclusions about other folks, don't be surprised when they make similar assumptions about you...

Here's a great poem, "I dreamed death came the other night, and heaven's gates swung open wide. An angel came to meet me, and ushered me inside.

There to my astonishment, stood folks I'd known on earth. Some I'd judged and labeled, "*Unfit, of little worth.*" Angry words rose to my lips, but never were set free. For every face showed stunned surprise. No one expected me!" "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*"

Now having clarified what verse 1 means, we need to talk about what it doesn't mean. For I have no doubt that Matthew 7:1 is the most misquoted and distorted verse in all of the Bible. *This verse is constantly being made to say what it was never meant to say...*

Talk to the couple who's shacking up - tell them they're living in sin - and they'll bark at you, "You think you're so good. Don't tell me what's right and wrong - the Bible says, "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*"

Or confront a teenager who's been experimenting with drugs, and he or she will fire back, "I learned in Sunday School... "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*"

Or insist on integrity on the job, and some co-worker will whine, "You're so judgmental. Don't you know the Bible says, "*Judge not, that you be not judged?*"

A person may be completely unfamiliar with the rest of the Bible, but you can bet they've learned one verse.

They've even committed it to memory.

When a Christian takes a stand against sin, and insists on righteousness, the other person will pull out this verse - Matthew 7:1 - and shout, "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*" *This is ammunition for the ignorant.*

When Jesus spoke this verse He wasn't suggesting we bury our heads in the sand - and ignore the sin in our lives, or the sin around us. *Vagueness is no virtue.*

Jesus is certainly not *muzzling* the voice of *morality*.

If I say that homosexuality is wrong - or Mormonism is heretical - it's not *my judgment* I'm espousing... God has already judged these matters in the Bible.

Morality and truth is not *my opinion* against *your opinion!* Here's the issue - *what does the Bible teach?* As Christians we're required to stand on God's Word.

Remember the author of "*Judge not...*" also drove the greedy, crooked moneychangers from the Temple.

He uttered a scathing rebuke against the hypocritical Pharisees in Matthew 23... calling them "*blind guides*" and a "*brood of vipers...*" Earlier in Chapter 7:15, Jesus says to His disciples, "*Beware of false prophets.*"

Obviously, false prophets don't enter the church wearing a name tag that reads, "*Hi, I'm a wolf.*"

Implied is the need for discernment. At times we do need to make judgments. We should expose the cultist's lies, and identify doctrines that are false.

In verse 20 of Chapter 7 we're told, "*By their fruits you will know them.*" We all should be fruit-inspectors.

In fact, look at what Jesus tells us just 5 verses after He says "*Judge not.*" Drop down to Mathew 7:6, "*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.” *Talk about judging!*

In the first century, dogs were never pets. They were considered wild beasts. They were savage and vicious. Dogs scavenged. They lived in the garbage dumps.

Try to pet a Palestinian dog, and you would lose a finger... You would never take a sacrifice offered to God, and toss it to these mongrels to rip into pieces.

And the swine were just as savage. Jews not only considered swine ceremonially unclean, but dangerous. Hogs were ferocious. There were no little piglets in Jesus’ day. It would be ludicrous to take a pearl necklace and hang it from a swine’s neck.

And according to Jesus there are members of the human race who spiritually speaking are like *dogs* and *hogs*. These people have no *taste for the truth*. They feed on spiritual garbage. And you waste valuable time and effort trying to feed them with holy delicacies.

It’s better to wait on God to prepare their *hearts to hear*, before you try to fill their *heads with truth*...

There's a whole world out there that needs Jesus. Don't let Satan bog you down with a hard-hearted person - and distract you from those who would welcome the truth if they heard it. *Satan loves to see us slopping hogs, when we could be feeding sheep.*

But here’s the point, verse 6 demands that we make judgments - wise, biblical, spiritual judgments - but judgments nonetheless. **At times we have to judge.**

When Jesus tells His disciples to *“Judge not”* the Greek word that’s translated *“judge”* is the word *“krino.”* It means *“to judge with the intent to condemn.”*

What Jesus prohibits are judgments made to *put someone down* or *cut someone up*. If we judge another person it should never be for *condemnation*...

There are three reasons to judge another person...

For *identification* - for our *preservation* - for that person's *restoration* - but never for *condemnation*.

Whenever we point out sin its to help and heal the sinner - not to condemn them and write them off.

In the upper room Jesus noticed His disciples had dirty feet - but He didn't talk about the dirt - or rebuke them for having dirty feet - rather He washed their feet.

Jesus lifted them up, He didn't put them down.

Too many Christians think they're the soul patrol.

They consider it their job to cruise the church looking for violators of God's law... It's their ministry to write tickets - and issue warnings - and set standards - and determine the spiritual *haves* from the *have nots*.

These people are quick to point out sin, but offer no hope for deliverance. They're a blight on the body! They do great damage. It's been said, "You have a right to censure, only if you have a heart to help."

Don't *criticize* a person unless you're willing to *familiarize* yourself with their plight, and *mobilize* to help in their need. "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*"

As Christians we're called to make *biblical judgments* not *personal judgments*. Where the Bible speaks we can speak with authority, but again it's the truth of

Scripture - *not my prejudice, or preferences, or tradition* - that's the measuring stick... Any judgment I make should be based on *God's Word*, not *my whims*.

It reminds me of the man who was selected for jury duty. He had other plans for the week and wanted to get dismissed as early in the process as possible.

The first chance he got he approached the judge, and told him he should be disqualified from the case.

He admitted he was biased. He pointed to the man at the table, "Your Honor, I have no doubt he's guilty. He looks like a crook - smells like a crook - sounds like a crook. He committed the crime, let him do the time. There's no way I could give this fellow a fair trial."

The judge looked at the juror and told him, "Sir, shut-up, and go back and take your seat in the jury box."

The man started to argue, "But Your Honor..."

The Judge answered him, "The man you pointed to isn't even the defendant. He's the district attorney."

We need to be careful to see situations as they are, *not as we want them to be*. We draw conclusions that are convenient and self-serving, rather than truthful.

We all should've learned by now that *looks can be deceiving*. *That's why you take a used car to your mechanic before you spend your hard earned money.*

A car can look good - all cleaned and polished - but a pretty exterior doesn't tell you what's under the hood.

On the other hand, my wife drives a 1998 Suburban that's now logged over 210,000 miles. The upholstery has a few tears, the body is dented where my son backed into

a tree - but that Suburban gets her where she needs to go... “*Dependable*” is its middle name.

My point is appearances can mislead.

Years ago, before my kids came along I had a beard and I rode a motorcycle - even had a leather jacket.

In fact, for a while that motorcycle was my primary mode of transportation. I rode it everywhere - to church, around town, even took it on hospital visits.

I always parked my bike in the designated parking for pastors. I had a clergy parking pass I stuck in my faring... And folks would stare holes through me... *A pastor riding his bike to the hospital was unthinkable!*

One night I was leaving Dekalb General when I pulled up to the toll booth, and handed the guy my clergy parking pass. He didn't even see the pass - all he could see was a bearded guy on a motorcycle.

He kept asking me for my payment. I kept shaking my pass in his face. He probably thought I must've murdered a pastor and stole his free pass. Finally, he smirked at me, and motioned me to go through...

I laughed and told him, “Buddy, I know it's confusing. But they just don't make pastors like they use to!”

But let me ask, “Do you ever pigeon-hole people? Do you take a look at them, size them up, and immediately categorize them without really getting to know them?”

It's these kinds of prejudicial judgments that paralyze our fellowship, and hinder God's work among us.

Judgments that are based on *a person's hair, or clothes, or skin color, or tattoos, or age, or accent, or occupation* - on the externals, instead of the internals...

Have you ever been guilty of making blanket assumptions like... All homeless people are lazy... All politicians are dishonest... All preachers are money-hungry... All single adults are hopeless... All teenagers are irresponsible... All parents are out-of-touch...

All lawyers are crooks... All accountants are boring... All Georgia Tech fans are nerds... All umpires are blind... All New Yorkers are rude... All Episcopalians are liberal... All bosses are unsympathetic... All rich people are materialistic... All blondes are dense...

All policeman hang out at Dunkin Donuts... None of us like to be pigeon-holed - *why do it to other people?*

We all like to be given the benefit of the doubt - *so let's treat others the way we desire to be treated.*

Let's take heed to the counsel Jesus gives in another place, John 7:24, "**Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.**"

As a student in South Africa, Mohandas Ghandi read the Gospels and was impressed with the teachings of Jesus. He felt Christianity might be the solution to India's oppressive caste system. He considered converting to Christianity, and becoming a Christian.

That's when he went to a church to seek a pastor's help... But when he entered the church that Sunday he was refused a seat. He was told by the white usher on duty, to leave, and worship God with his own people...

Ghandi left not only the Church - but *Christianity* that day - and never returned. He wrote, "If Christians have caste differences also, I might as well remain a Hindu."

Superficial judgment turned off Ghandi forever.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been contrasting *love* and *law - internal, goodness of heart* with *external, window dressing - righteousness born of the Spirit and self-righteousness produced by legalism*.

And this self-righteous person has a problem.

When he or she stacks themselves up against God's standards they find themselves severely lacking...

So, to sooth their conscience they make a habit out of comparing themselves with other people. They make other people look bad, so they'll look good!

A self-righteous man condemns other people to justify himself. The more he picks at others - *the more fault he finds* - the more secure he feels about himself.

This is what the Pharisee did to the tax collector in the parable Jesus told in Luke 18:11. He said, "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...'"

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches us that real spirituality is inward - whereas, the Pharisees concocted an outward form of righteousness. When it came

to deeds the Pharisees were squeaky clean, but on the inside their attitude stunk to high heaven.

And since their righteousness was outward - they used performance oriented activities as the measuring stick... As far as they were concerned you were right with God only if you kept their rituals and traditions.

And this is still the *modus operandi* of the self-righteous. They develop their own litmus test for true spirituality... *whether it's what you drink, or eat, or wear, or your style of music, or the translation of the Bible you use, or the social cause you support...*

The potential list of stipulations is endless.

The Pharisee isn't interested in the work of the Holy Spirit inside your heart. He only cares whether you've conformed to his own personal set of standards.

Here's the self-righteous person's motto, "Believe as I believe, no more, no less, that I am right - and no one else. Feel as I feel, think only as I think, eat what I eat, and drink what I drink. Look as I look, do always as I do; then and only then, will I fellowship with you."

Again, we're called on to make *biblical judgments*, not *personal judgments*. If you see me flirting with immorality, then certainly call me on carpet! If you hear me teach false doctrine, then report me to the elders!

But if you don't like my jokes, or how I do the announcements, or that I get a little obnoxious about my loyalty to the Bulldogs, or that I wear blue jeans...

Then get over it, please, and learn to overlook it... or at least talk to me about it... but whatever you do, don't accuse me of carnality and question my love for God.

No man can judge another man's spiritual condition, because no man can look into another person's heart!

It's very difficult to judge another man's motive.

You can observe the fruit of a person's life, and note the wisdom of their actions - but you have no right to question their motive. Only God knows their heart!

1 Corinthians 4:5 tells us, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one's praise will come from God." Every heart will be revealed, but only when the Lord returns. In the meantime it's not for me to pry.

When my daughter Natalie was in college, to make extra money she started umpiring softball games.

My sweet, bubbly, pastor's daughter was calling balls and strikes, and throwing coaches out of the ballpark.

One day Natalie told me the only real problem she ever had was with one coach... who was a local pastor. *Imagine, a pastor getting upset with an umpire!*

Yet sadly, a lot of us are umpires at heart. When someone else is pitching we like to call balls and strikes. We're quick to criticize - question the other guy.

Seldom do I criticize the quarterback while watching a football game. *Why? I was once a quarterback!*

And I know firsthand that your perspective changes when 300 pound man-eating beasts are breathing down your neck, trying to smash your face into the turf.

The average fan *doesn't know the play - has never felt the heat - will never even strap on a helmet...* yet they'll scream when a QB throws an errant pass.

Be careful with your criticism! How can you criticize your *boss*, when you've never sat in his seat... Or your *pastor*, if you've never been one... Or a *single mom*, if you're married... Or a *person holding down two jobs*, if you only work one... Or a *new believer struggling with alcohol* if you've never been an alcoholic?...

When I judge another person so much is hidden from view. And because I'm lacking specific and crucial details I'm not in a position to make a judgment!

Speaking of umpires, what irritates me most is when an arrogant umpire is out of position, but still makes the call without asking for help from his fellow umps.

How can an umpire see what's going on at third base if he's clear across the diamond behind first base?

And the same is true for us... It's arrogant for you or me to assume we see well enough to judge a person, when we're not in a position to see all the facts.

I heard the story of a young lawyer whose boss gave out turkeys for Thanksgiving. Since this lawyer was single, he didn't have much need for a turkey. One year the lawyer's co-workers decided to play a joke.

They replaced his turkey with a phony - one made of paper mache' - they weighted it so it would feel real.

On the way home that day the lawyer met a man on the bus who had fallen on hard times. Life had gotten so difficult the fellow was down to his last \$2.50.

The young lawyer felt sorry for the fellow, and wanted to give him the turkey - *but he thought the man might be insulted with mere charity* - so he sold him the turkey for

\$2.50. The poor man was excited. He left, bounding down the street with a turkey for his family.

On Monday, the lawyer's co-workers wanted to know how he'd liked his turkey. When he told them what he'd done, they panicked. They were so upset.

They searched the bus line for weeks, but never found the man who gave his last \$2.50 for a paper turkey. And the poor victim probably died thinking that a young lawyer had swindled him out of his last \$2.50.

For the rest of his life that poor fellow felt he had every right to be mad, and bitter toward lawyers, but his assumption was wrong. There were hidden details.

Here's a poem, "Pray, don't find fault with a man who limps, or stumbles along the road. Unless you have worn the shoes he wears. or struggled beneath his load. There may be tacks in his shoes that hurt, though hidden away from view. Or the burden he bears, placed on your back, might cause you to stumble, too.

Don't sneer at the man who is down today, unless you have felt the blow. That caused his fall, or felt the shame, that only the fallen know. You may be strong, but still the blows, that were his, if dealt to you... In the selfsame way, at the selfsame time, might cause you to stagger, too.

Don't be too harsh with a man who sins, or pelt him with words or stones. Unless you are sure, yes, doubly sure - that you have no sins of your own. For you know, perhaps, if the tempter's voice, should whisper as soft to you... As it did to him when he went astray, it would cause you to falter, too."

I'm becoming more and more convinced the greatest obstacle facing the church today is our own negativity.

Our problem is pettiness. Church members get picky.

They see the cup half empty, not half full. The church today needs more *cheerleaders*, and fewer *critics*.

When the famous St. Louis Cardinals' slugger, Stan Musial, broke into the big leagues he did so with a bang. In his first at-bat he singled. In his second at-bat he tripled. In his next two at-bats he hit home runs.

After the game, opposing pitcher, Bobo Newsome, was asked what he thought of the St. Louis phenom... "Aw, Musial ain't perfect. He can't even hit doubles."

Some people, like Bobo, are *negative by nature*.

They're blind to the good in other people. Jesus warns them - *expect the same criticism you dish out...*

Jesus says to us in verse 2, "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Be careful when you judge another person... If you ever think you might need some grace and forgiveness in the future, it would be wise to extend grace today.

I was a lot harder on pastors before I became one.

Now that I know what a pastor has to endure, I treat other pastors with the same mercy I'd like to be shown.

In the book of Judges there was a Canaanite king named Adoni-Bezek. This guy tortured the kings he conquered by cutting off their thumbs and big toes.

I suppose he wanted to be sure they *toed the line*.

But when the men of Judah conquered him - they did to the king what he had done to others. The king said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather their food under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." God judged the Adoni-Bezek with the same measure he used to judge others.

Be careful when you go *cutting people down* and *chopping people up* - God can see to it that what you do to others is exactly what ends up done to you!

Verse 3, "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye."

Jesus employs a little humor in His sermon. A particle gets in your eye. You head to the ophthalmologist to have it removed. That's when the door opens, and out walks a doctor with a 2x4 stud sticking from his eye-socket. The doc is in worse shape than his patient. His *stud* far exceeds your *speck*...

Yet the guy with a 2x4 is removing your toothpick!

This is nuts. He has no right to remove your speck when he has similar, yet bigger problems of his own.

It's said, "Faults are like headlights - the other car's headlights always seem more glaring than your own."

It's always easier for me to see *your sin*, than *my sin*.

Once, a college student rubbed limburger cheese on his sleeping roommate's mustache. When he woke up he couldn't believe the horrible smell. He told his friend, "this room stinks..." He went down the hall, "this hall stinks..." He went outside, "the whole world stinks..."

This ignorant fellow blamed the whole world for the odor that was actually coming from his own upper lip.

Remember when Nathan the prophet told King David the story of the large sheepherder who had cruelly taken his neighbor's only lamb to feed his guest.

He could've slaughter a lamb from his own herd, but he took from his poor neighbor. David was steamed!

He even screamed, "Kill the man. Off with his head!"

That's when Nathan, pointed his long boney finger in the King's face, and uttered, "You are the man!"

David was infuriated by the man in the story, without seeing that he was guilty of the very same crime.

The King was the sheepherder who had robbed Uriah of his beautiful wife, Bathsheba. We see sin in someone else so clearly, while we're blind to our own.

Once, a lady had friends over to her house for lunch.

Through the window she pointed to her neighbor's dirty house. In a snobby tone, she said, "My neighbor is so sloppy. Just look at the streaks on his siding."

That's when one of her friends replied, "Pardon me, but those streaks aren't on your neighbor's siding. They're on your window." Why do we like to hunt down sins in other people, while we harbor similar sins?

Eye surgery is a delicate, precise procedure.

It takes a skilled surgeon with unclouded vision to successfully remove a speck from a person's eye.

And the same is true spiritually. Not everyone is skilled in speck-removal. Thus, Paul told the Galatians, "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."

Don't go around looking for specks in other people. Spend your time dealing with the planks in your life.

When it comes to a brother or sister - give them the benefit of the doubt - assume the best - don't criticize.

And if out of your love for your brother it becomes obvious he or she needs help, then let those who are spiritual, *and who are aware of their own weaknesses*, approach that brother and correct him... not with guns blazing, but in a spirit of humility and gentleness.

Let me close, by taking us to Jerusalem.

It's early one morning. The sun is barely above the horizon, when men ram down a door, and snatch a woman out of bed. Without a chance to even dress herself, she's being pushed through the streets.

The angry mob enters the Temple courtyard where Jesus is standing. A delegation of religious men throw this woman down at His feet. With rocks in their hands, they growl, "Alright Teacher, we caught her in adultery - in the very act. The Law says put her in a pit and throw rocks at her until she's dead. What do You say?"

But Jesus ignored their malicious question. Rather, the Master stooped, and He began to doodle in the dirt.

This mob meant business. They weren't going to be slighted. Her accusers were demanding an answer...

Yet slowing and deliberately Jesus raised His head, and He said to these men, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

Then Jesus stooped again, and once more wrote in the dirt. Scripture says one by one the men dropped their rocks - *and accusations* - and walked away!

What had been a crowded courtyard a few minutes earlier now held just two people, Jesus and this wayward woman. Ironically, Jesus was the only person in the circle that day qualified to cast a stone - *for He was the only one without sin* - yet Jesus had chosen to forgive this woman, rather than condemn her.

Our Lord told the adulteress, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more"

Often we retreat to this story when we deserve the rocks. It's reassurance that Jesus is willing to forgive us, and extend His mercy and grace to the likes of us.

But we need to remember this story, and Jesus' example, when the rocks are in our own hands!

Do the people not stacking up to our standards have a reason to squirm? As one person observed, "I marvel at the aim of some sinners when given a stone."

"Judge not, that you be not judged."

Don't accuse who you won't assist... Don't rebuke who you won't repair... Don't censure who you won't comfort... As the Body of Christ our primary function is not to be each other's *critic* - but to be each other's *confidant* - to support and encourage one another.

Let me leave you with the following words ringing in our ears... Colossians 3:12-13, "As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

To that, I say, "Amen." Let's you and I "*put on love!*"