

Introduction

The society in which we live highly values one virtue in particular. It praises this virtue as an important key to maintaining civility and enabling people to get along. This highly valued virtue is tolerance. D. A. Carson says that “tolerance is today as non-negotiable a virtue in the culture at-large as motherhood and apple pie were in America in the 1950s.”

Not only has tolerance grown to a highly prized position among the virtues, the notion of tolerance has undergone a shift. It used to be that tolerance represented a willingness to defend a person’s right to espouse their viewpoint even if one disagreed with that viewpoint. However, today’s understanding of tolerance is characterized by an unwillingness in certain aspects of life to say that another person is wrong. It is especially true in areas of morality and religion. In these areas the one thing that is wrong is for a person to assert that another person is wrong. To do so is to commit the socially unpardonable sin of intolerance. To do so is also to be told, “You `re not supposed to judge.” Well, what about that? Well, to this matter we turn in our study of Jesus’s great Sermon on the Mount.

[Read Text; Pray]

So let’s recall that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is preaching about the kingdom of God. He first talks about who it is that gets in the kingdom and then he outlines how the citizens of the kingdom shall live. We have seen that they are distinct from the world and their behavior in the world should evidence that distinction. In recent days we have seen how they are to give to the needy, pray, and even fast. We have seen how they are to relate to the stuff in the world; they are not to be overly attached to the world or worried about the supply for their needs in the world. This morning we come to look at how they are to relate to sin in the world, particularly the sins of others, the sinfulness in the world. Are we to judge? Are we to discern? Are we to act in accordance with what we observe? Let’s see.

We begin this morning with . . .

I. The Most Misunderstood Verse in the Bible.

It is Matthew 7:1. "Judge not that you be not judged."

A. I want you first to consider the way it is misunderstood. That will not be hard because it is the way you hear people using it all the time.

People regularly say things like the following. You are not supposed to judge. It is not your place to tell me what is right and what is wrong. It is wrong to make moral judgments about people. You shouldn't be making judgments about sexual behavior or marital fidelity. It is not your place to say that homosexual marriage is wrong. Who are you to tell me I am a male when I feel like a female? It is not your place to tell me anything I want to do it wrong. That's judging, and the Bible says, "Judge not lest you be judged."

From the outset, this morning I want you to know that these remarks and others like them represent a MISUNDERSTANDING of what Jesus teaches in Matthew 7:1.

B. I want to show you, then, why this verse is so misunderstood.

1. It is misunderstood, first, because of a failure to look at the immediate context. No verse in the Bible is a complete island. Every word must be carefully considered in light of its surroundings or we will be headed off the tracks of accuracy in understanding.

Verse 2, for example speaks volumes about what Jesus says in verse 1. Look at verse 2. "For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." The little word for connects these two verses. It is an indication that there is an underlying reason or foundation in verse 2 that produces the exhortation he makes in verse 1. Verse 2 also clarifies what Jesus has in mind when he says, "judge not." So what do we learn in verse 2? We learn that there are different kinds and measures of judgment. And the ones that God will apply to you are the ones that you use. So when Jesus says, "Judge not," he is speaking of a particular kind and a particular measure of judging. He further explains his point when he proceeds to verse 3. Here he asks why people see wrongs in others but miss huge sinful matters in their own selves. He calls

persons who judge like this hypocrites. Now what does he himself do right there at that point in the sermon? He judges. He declares a certain kind of person a hypocrite. Then he tells them that what they need to do is to stop judging, right? No! He tells them to take the log out of their eye so they can judge best, and that means taking the piece out of the eye of their brother.

Then Jesus takes this a step further and says, "do not give dogs what is holy, and do not cast your pearls before swine." These are not endearing terms here. They are derogatory. Jesus is telling his disciples to recognize people who fit in these derogatory categories and behave in a certain way toward them. My brothers and sisters, you cannot do what Jesus says to do without judging.

People who say Matthew 7:1 means no judging period, are shown to be mistaken because they fail to pay attention to the context in which Jesus makes the statement.

2. This verse is further misunderstood because of a failure to consider the whole biblical context. Let me give you a couple texts which underscore the necessity of some kind of judgment.

There was John the Baptist who was charging Herod with sin because he had Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. John was judging.

John 7:24 – "Do not judge by appearances, judge with right judgment."

You can't get much stronger than this statement by the Apostle Paul.

Galatians 1:8-9 – But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now we say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed (eternally condemned).

The Bible issues judgments all over the place. It is a book of law and judgments. The breaking of God's law incurs judgment. And God has put people together in part to remind one another of what God approves and

disapproves and to exhort one another to walk in his ways. They are also a light to the world to show the world God's ways as opposed to sinful ways.

Listen, what is the calling of those who teach the Bible? Paul tells Timothy to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season;" he tells him to "reprove; rebuke; and exhort." You cannot do this without making moral judgments and telling people to turn from the wrong and turn toward the right. To assert that judging wrongfully means to make NO judgments is to miss the context of Matthew and the context of the whole Bible.

3. In the third case, the text is misunderstood because by our natural bent, none of us wants to be told that what we are doing is wrong. We would like that this verse disallowed all judgment period because our flesh would be all the more happier. Jesus declares in John 3:19 that "everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed." There is an evil motivation in the flesh to escape judgment, so we are prone to look for a way of escape. That is another reason people adopt an erroneous view of what Jesus was actually saying.

C. So individuals who care very little for the Bible as a whole seize upon this verse and use it to assert that you are wrong for telling them they are wrong. And not a few people who claim to believe the Bible do the same. But they are wrong. Jesus is not saying there must be a suspension of moral judgment in his followers. Rather it is judging in a particular kind of way that he disallows.

The most unloving thing we could do would be to keep silent about sin and let people perish in it.

So let's look next at

II. The Judging Jesus Disallows

He is clearly not disallowing all judgment, but what kind of judgment is Jesus instructing his kingdom citizens to avoid? And why?

A. He is strong about avoiding this kind of judgment because if you do it you will be judged for it. Judge not, that you be not judged. Let's be clear as we talk about what kind of judgment Jesus is addressing that we realize

that it is an incredibly serious thing. It is out of character for what Jesus has been setting forth in the lives of kingdom citizens. And clearly it is hated by heaven if it is to be judged.

And by the way, this seems a fitting time for us all to be reminded that there is a day of judgment looming on the horizon. The disdain that human beings have for being told we are doing wrong, that we are sinning against God would lead us to take refuge in false ideas that there is not a coming day of judgment. Such refuge is but a mirage. False ideas will not, however, change the fact that a day of judgment is coming. And it will be a fearful day indeed.

2 Corinthians 5:10 – for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Romans 14:10 – we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Believers will stand and give account. Unbelievers will give account as well. We are warned so we might escape being judged for judging wrongly.

B. So what is this judging wrongly?

I see two primary marks in this text. They actually fit together but one leads to the other. The two marks are these. One mark is the absence of mercy. And the other mark is self-righteousness. The judgment Jesus condemns is judgment without mercy and without the awareness and acceptance of one's own sinfulness.

1. In verse 2 we see that the judging Jesus condemns is judging in a way that we would not want to be judged ourselves. See, the warning is that you who judge wrongly will be judged in the way that you are judging. It is a warning and not a good sign. You will want to avoid the kind of judgment before God with which many are judging others.

So what kind of judgment is this? In a word, it is unmerciful judgment. It is judgment without pity. It is hard and insensitive. It is almost happy to find a wrong in someone else and happier still to point out that sin. This is

the way the Pharisees judged. They upheld lesser parts of the law as an excuse not to keep the greater. And usually the result was the hurt of other human beings. They were without mercy.

Take for example, the day when Jesus was walking through grainfields on the Sabbath. The disciples were feeding their hunger by picking heads of grain and eating. The Pharisees were appalled; the disciples were working on the Sabbath. They pointed it out to Jesus and said, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath!" Jesus, in return, brought to their attention how David once entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence which was not lawful for him to eat but only the priests. But because he was hungry and had no food, the ceremonial law was set aside for the well-being of the human's urgent need. Jesus charged them with not understanding God's desire for mercy.

Jesus went from there and healed a man with a withered hand. They asked Jesus "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" in order that they might accuse him. Jesus healed the man saying it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. And what did the Pharisees do? They went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

That is judging without mercy. It is judging to condemn not to correct, not to help, not to redeem. It is judgment performed in order to show themselves superior. This is what we might call judgmentalism. There is no compassion, no love. Their judgment will be without mercy as well.

2. Corresponding to the absence of mercy, this judgmentalism which Jesus is denouncing is marked by an air of self-righteousness. It refuses to own up to sin in itself. It is haughty, arrogant, prideful, and blind.

Look how Jesus illustrates this point in verses 3-5. 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?

Now back in chapter 6, Jesus had said that the eye is the what of the body? The lamp. It is that organ through which light shines into the body. He was making the point that if your eye is clouded by love for earthly

treasures, you won't be able to see well. Your perception will be darkened. The bigger the obstruction, no doubt, the less you will be able to see and the greater the spiritual darkness within. Now here is a log and something called a speck. The speck is actually probably a little more substantive than that word would indicate. It is more like a stalk, a stem, a stick, or perhaps a splinter, but still it is smaller than a log. Nevertheless it is sizable and very much a serious issue. All sin is bad. All sin is rebellion against the Holy One. All sin destroys fellowship with God. But some sin is extreme in its wickedness. The log represents such sin.

What is it that keeps someone's attention on the lesser sins of others while seeming oblivious to their own more serious sins? It in itself is the sin of self-righteousness. Here is one who believes they are better, who believes they are not a sinner. Yes, the log in the eye is an obstruction that clouds the light and how great is the darkness in the soul.

We see this faulty judgment illustrated in the little parable in which Jesus compared the prayer of the Pharisee with that of the tax-collector. You know the tax-collector beat his breast and prayed simply, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." In contrast, the Pharisee reflects his judgmental self-righteousness even as he prays; "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." Oh. If only he WERE like the tax-collector. If he were more like the tax-collector then he might have been able to help the tax-collector. But no, he thinks he is better than that. He is deadly oblivious to his wickedness, and his self-righteous judgmental spirit is the thing that Jesus condemns here.

The one with the log lacks a heart that has dealt with his own guilt. He has no mercy but is full of self-righteousness. That is his log. Until he comes to confess his own guilt, his own sin, his own pride and haughtiness, he is no good to anyone but to stir up strife and contention. People have splinters in their eyes. They have obstructions. These are our sins. And we need help. We need to help each other. And such help requires judgment, but not this kind of blurred and obstructed judgment. Kingdom citizens do not soft-pedal sin. They are concerned for the righteousness of God. They want to be holy in all their conduct as he who called them is holy. But they realize

that it cannot happen without their first ripping the log out of their eye. They must be willing to see themselves for who they are. They are the sick who need a doctor. They are wandering sheep who need their shepherd. They are no help to the other sheep until they first get things squared away with the shepherd. They must repent of their hypocrisy.

The great shepherd, by the way died on a cross made of logs to reconcile to himself sinners not the self-righteous, but sinners who will repent of their self-righteousness.

Finally I want you to see . . .

III. The Judging that Jesus Endorses

Jesus is not calling for his kingdom citizens to go soft on sin. He certainly didn't go soft on sin. I think of how he called out the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. I would set before you in fact that among the greatest offenders of this command, judge not that you be not judged, are those who see it as a prohibition of all judging altogether. When they say, "But you are not supposed to judge," are they not judging? And furthermore are they not judging self-righteously? So be careful against denouncing those who love you enough to speak to you of righteousness!

Jesus is not calling his people to go soft on truth and righteousness, but he is telling us to go about it in a certain way.

A. He is calling for humility. He is calling for sinners to see themselves as fellow tax-collectors and to beat their chests before God for their sin. This is what will enable them to get the pieces out of each others' eyes. As Paul tells the Galatians, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." So judge with mercy. Judge gently and humbly.

B. He is calling for clarity of vision. Getting the log out of your eye is necessary to be able to see. Daily be on your face confessing sin and humbling yourself before God.

C. He is calling for caring confrontation. In verses 3-5 three times here is the word brother. This is part of what brothers and sisters are for...

spurring one another on to love and good deeds. Iron sharpens iron.

Listen to Hebrews 10:19-25.

Therefore, BROTHERS, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near. . . . Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

D. Finally, he is calling for discerning discipline. Look at verse 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." You simply can't identify a dog or a pig without some judging discernment. The dogs here are not Labradors or collies or corgis but half-wild scavengers. They were dirty, dangerous, and despised. Pigs were reprehensible to the Jews as they were unclean and probably mostly wild as well. The Jews would not have domesticated them. These two figures represent those who have not the desire for the word. They are consumed with the world. In Philippians Paul warns of those who mutilate the gospel and trust in themselves. He calls them dogs. They reject the word and they reject the gospel. Jesus' instruction about dogs and pigs is this. When you encounter people who reject the ministry of the word and reject the true gospel, let them go. Don't keep giving them what is holy. Don't keep sharing with them the precious jewels of the faith. Share the holy and precious pearls of gospel truth with those who are receptive. The dogs and pigs will not be interested in what you have to say; they will just trample you down.

Conclusion

So see. Jesus actually does call us to judge and to act judiciously. Do not be silenced by the self-righteous world that says it is wrong to speak up about right and wrong. Just make sure you do it the right way without self-righteousness and with merciful intent. It is not a delight to be able to condemn sin. But it is a delight to see a sinner repent of the sin. First, therefore, humble yourself before God. Take out the log. Cast yourself on Jesus' mercy and then help the brethren in our quest to rid ourselves of sin for the glory of God.