

*A young couple moved into a new house in the neighborhood, and the following morning while they were eating breakfast, the young woman looked out the window and saw her neighbor hanging her wash to dry on the clothes line.*

*“That laundry is not very clean,” she said to her husband. “She doesn’t seem to know how to wash correctly. Maybe she needs better laundry soap.” Her husband looked on, but kept silent. Every time her neighbor hung her wash to dry, the young woman repeated the same observations about the dirty laundry.*

*About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash hanging on the clothes line and she said to her husband: “Look, our neighbor has apparently learned how to wash her clothes – I wonder what happened?”*

*Well, the husband replied, “I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows.”*

For several weeks, we’ve been working our way through the *Sermon on the Mount*, where up on a hill near Capernaum, Jesus is teaching about the kingdom of God – and people likely in the thousands, from all over the place, and from all different kinds of backgrounds hiked up the hill to listen. Jesus is teaching about the kingdom – how to enter into it and how to live in it – saying things they had never heard before – touching on issues they had not considered.

In His sermon, Jesus began with the *Beatitudes* – the attitudes that ought to be, where He focused on character and conduct. He talked about *salt* and *light*, challenging His followers to be godly influences in the lives of others so that others may look to God. Jesus proclaimed He was the fulfillment of Scripture and He zeroed in on certain aspects of their theology – diving deeper into matters of the heart and exposing just how wrong they were being taught by the self-righteous religious leaders.

Speaking of self-righteousness, Jesus explained that the way they practiced their faith was also wrong because it was all done just to be seen. Their *giving*, their *praying*, and their *fasting* was all done for the attention and the applause of others.

And as for prayer, Jesus gave His listeners a model to follow – a model to guide their thoughts when talking to the Father, and afterwards, He spoke about their *treasures* because He knew their hearts leaned towards their treasures, and He wanted their hearts turned heavenward, and then springboarding from that, Jesus moved to the topic of *anxiety*, because ultimately, anxiety drains us and distracts us from treasuring and trusting our Father. Jesus does not want His followers to

worry because we have a Father in heaven who knows us, who loves us and cares for us in spite of us, and He has given us hope.

Now, all of that sets up our next passage where Jesus turns His attention to relationships – specifically, the way we think of and treat others. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 7** and beginning with **verse 1**, Jesus says this:

**<sup>1</sup>“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup>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? <sup>4</sup>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? <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>“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.**

Have you ever heard a good sermon and said to yourself, “*Boy, I sure hope ‘so and so’ is listening to this. They really need to hear what’s being said.*”

So far in His *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus has been sharing challenging and convicting truths about righteousness and unrighteousness and self-righteousness from God’s point of view, and the last thing Jesus wants His listeners to do is to start elbowing the person next to them as if they are the problem. This sermon is for the hearers – it’s meant for people like you and me, and Jesus says “**Do not judge so that you will not be judged.**”

I suspect that many of you have heard those words before. In fact, you may have heard those words from people who know nothing about the Bible – people who want you to accept their lifestyle. *Do not judge*. It’s a popular phrase that people quote, even though most who quote this don’t understand what Jesus is really saying when it comes to judging.

Now, that word “*judge*” is key in this passage, and for our purposes, it can be viewed in two different ways – one way is negative and the other is positive. In the negative way, to judge can refer to a *criticizing and condemning attitude* towards others, but in the positive way, to judge can also mean to *discern and to decide* – something we all have to do each and every day – and in this passage, both views are represented – meaning, this is not a warning against judging as some might assume – it’s a warning against judging in the wrong way.

In research that was done among twenty-somethings for the book, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity*, nearly nine out of ten young people view Christians as “*judgmental*.” Of course, I don’t know if that is founded or not, but I do know that we live in a culture where everyone – to include Christians, seem to be criticizing and maligning everybody over just about everything. People are chewing on one another, especially through social media – it’s harsh, and it’s hurtful, and it should not be what characterizes us as followers of Jesus Christ.

He said, **“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.**

I have no doubt some of the self-righteous religious leaders – the Pharisees were up on the hill listening to Jesus say this. They were the ones who took God’s Word, twisted it to suit themselves, and created their own system of morality which they imposed on God’s people, and of course, in doing so, they set themselves up as judges.

As self-proclaimed judges, they excused their own faults but not the faults of others. They picked on people, they jumped on their failures, they criticized, and they condemned – judging who was right with God and who was not. They were unloving, unmerciful, and unforgiving towards anyone who didn’t *look* like they thought they should look, who didn’t *act* like they thought they should act, and who didn’t *talk* like they thought they should talk. They criticized and condemned anyone who did not meet *their* standard of righteousness.

As Christians, we can’t do that, and as **James** would later remind the readers in his letter, “*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge*” implying the real problem with passing judgment on others is that it brings us dangerously close to playing God. You see, to play God in the lives of others is to imagine yourself above others with the right of putting them down.

*Chuck Swindoll tells this story that occurred while he was in seminary. He said, “We had a guest missionary speaker who did a lousy job in his sermon. Afterward a group of us stood in the back and badmouthed the message. We ripped him apart with a smug, critical spirit. And we weren’t concealing our scorn, because an underclassman overheard us. He targeted me for censure because—I hate to admit it—I was one of the officers of the student body. I should have known better.*

*That younger man grabbed me by the arm and said, “Chuck, you don’t know all the facts.”*

*“What do you mean?” I said, “That was a pitiful message!”*

*He responded: “Did you know that two hours before the message, his wife called and told him his youngest son had been killed? Did you know that three months before, his wife was diagnosed with terminal cancer? And in spite of all that, he still came and delivered his message.”*

*The younger student had every right to confront me. You can’t imagine the shame I felt. I had judged—and spoken against—a brother in Christ who delivered his poor message under unimaginably difficult circumstances. I didn’t know the facts.*

*Far too often Christians criticize others before we get all the facts. We observe an event, catch a few words of a conversation, or gather a handful of random facts. We then leap to conclusions and start flapping our jaws about it. The jabbering catches on and spreads, and before you know it the “gossip” becomes “news.” There’s nothing more contagious than a negative spirit – it spreads like a cold in a kindergarten.*

*Thankfully, the younger seminarian had the guts to confront me about my judgmental attitude before it got out of control. He appropriately reminded me that I wasn’t qualified to pass judgment on that missionary.*

Listen, it’s much easier to be critical than to be correct; therefore, in so many words, Jesus says “*knock it off.*” It’s wrong to judge others in this way because we can never know all the facts about a person or see into their hearts to know their motives. Only God can do that.

So, stop the criticizing and the condemning – and just for the sake of clarification, there may be times where it’s necessary to confront a brother or sister about their behavior – but there’s a difference between *confrontation* for the purpose of building up and *condemnation* for the purpose of tearing down.

It’s harmful and hurtful in more ways than one, for Jesus makes it clear that playing the role of judge in this way has a way of boomeranging. He says, “**by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.**” The critical attitudes that we exhibit will result in the same treatment toward us. We’ll get back what

we dish out because, if the truth be told, we usually do a version of the same thing we accuse others of doing.

When we fail to show grace to others, it will be more difficult for others to show grace to us. When we point our fingers at others, we'll draw the attention of those with critical attitudes. When we apply unjust standards to others, we shouldn't be surprised when others apply unjust standards to us. There's no double standard here, and that's precisely where Jesus leads us next. He says,

**<sup>3</sup> 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? <sup>4</sup> 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? <sup>5</sup> 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.**

If you have ever wondered if Jesus had a sense of humor, these words should put that to rest. It's comical, it's kind of ridiculous, and yet His point is very clear. We are quick to see the faults in our Christian brothers and sisters, while we are blind to our own.

That word for “**speck**” refers to a *tiny piece of dried wood*, like a splinter and the word for “**log**” is the word for a *large load-bearing beam*, and it's interesting to note that they are both made from the same thing.

*A group of residents in a Connecticut town were terribly upset about the reckless driving on their suburban streets, so 53 of them signed a petition calling for tighter traffic control in their neighborhoods. The sheriff responded by setting up a watch a few nights later. He caught five violators in all – and each of them had signed the petition! They themselves were guilty of the very transgressions of which they were so critical.*

Many Christians are like this. They see themselves as self-appointed fault-finders for the wrongs of their brothers and sisters in Christ. They see everything wrong in everybody else's life – and they are quick to point it out, but they are often blind to the greater wrongs in their own lives. They *maximize* the faults of others while *minimizing* their own. They are self-righteous and Jesus calls them **hypocrites**.

Listen, Christian love is not blind, and Jesus is not telling us to mind our own business. Sometimes other Christians need guidance and correction to overcome a struggle – there's nothing wrong with helping to remove a *splinter*. In grace and

gentleness, we have that responsibility for each other, but before we do so, we must first be honest about where we stand.

Jesus never says, “Ignore the faults of others,” but He does say, “Take care of your own faults first.” Look in the mirror. Ask God to show you your sins like it was asked in **Psalm 139**:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.*

If we would pray that way and really mean it, if we would allow God to show us our sins, our weaknesses, our faults, our mistakes, our bad attitudes, our foolish words, our pride, our arrogance, our need to be in control, our need to run the world, our need to tell others what to do, our desire to have our own way, our anger, our bitterness, our lack of mercy, our lack of love, our lack of compassion – if we would pray that way, we would do a lot more *confessing* and a lot less *judging*.

So, the point here is this: Believers are not to have these critical and condemning, fault-finding attitudes – always being negative, always complaining about something, always being aware of the minor problems in the lives of others while being oblivious to their own greater faults – judging others by one standard and yet judging themselves by another.

Our habitual response to God must first be to ask, “*What about me?*” before we ask “*What about others?*” – “**for in the way you judge, you will be judged.**”

*A small-town baker bought his butter from a local farmer. One day he weighed the butter and concluded that the farmer had been reducing the amount in the packages but charging the same. So, the baker accused the farmer of fraud.*

*In court the judge asked the farmer, “Do you have measuring weights?”*  
“No sir,” replied the farmer.

*“How then do you manage to weigh the butter that you sell?”*

*The farmer answered, “When the baker began buying his butter from me, I thought I’d better get my bread from him. I have been using his one-pound loaf as the weight for the butter I sell. If the weight of the butter is wrong, he has only himself to blame.”*



Do not judge others until you first take a good hard honest look at yourself and are prepared to be judged by the same standard.

So, we have spent some time looking at judging with a critical and condemning attitude, now let's look at judging with discernment where Jesus swings the pendulum in the opposite extreme direction to make His point. He says in **verse 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.”**

**Wow, what's that all about?** Well, in that culture, *dogs* and *hogs* were unclean animals, and for clarification, these dogs were not like our sweet little puppies. They were wild and dangerous mangy mutts, and hogs as you know, were totally unclean to the Jews.

Jesus implies that no priest would take the meat given as a holy sacrifice on the altar and toss it to the *dogs*, and likewise, only a fool would give precious and valuable pearls to a *hog*. That would be unthinkable – and that's His point. In the proper way of judging, we are to be discerning. This is what Solomon asked for in **1 Kings 3:5-12** and this is what God wants for us. Listen to this:

*<sup>5</sup> In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, “Ask what you wish Me to give you.” <sup>6</sup> Then Solomon said, “You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. <sup>7</sup> Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. **For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”** <sup>10</sup> It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. <sup>11</sup> God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, <sup>12</sup> behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.*

When it comes to judging in the right way, we are to have an understanding heart, a listening heart – we are to be discerning. This is what Solomon prayed for and it's what God wants as we share our lives, our resources, our time, our opinions, and our message – God's Word with others.

As believers, judging is not wrong – it's something we have to do each and every day, but instead of *blasting* one another with critical and condemning attitudes that tend to be hypocritical in nature – instead of getting *busted* by the boomerang and the beam – let's be a *blessing* to one another with biblical discernment.

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