

Playing Judge 5-2-04

Matthew 7:1-6 (NIV)

¹"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. ⁶"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

Josh McDowell has said that the first verse of Matthew 7 has become the most popular verse in America, surpassing John 3:16 in the frequency of its use. It's not surprising. John 3:16 judges us. It declares that we are sinners in need of a Savior. That isn't a popular thought any longer. It declares my need and suggests a commitment. If God loved me enough to rescue me, I owe a debt of gratitude and service in response.

Matthew 7:1 on the other hand can be used as a hiding place for those who would tout tolerance as shield for immorality. They would say, "Don't you dare tell me I'm doing something wrong. Judge not or you will be judged." The expression was never meant to be used for self-defense, but as the Word of God, to discern the thoughts and intent of our own hearts. We are supposed to be applying it to ourselves.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged." It is Jesus' warning for the judgmental nature of man. History is filled with misjudgments. Einstein nearly failed one of his basic Math classes in elementary school. Moody was told that he was so bad at preaching that he should recognize it was not God's call for him. A few decades ago, people laughed at the idea of a computer in every home. Before the Passion was released, all the experts predicted a subtitled film about Jesus would be a flop. If we stopped to think about it, we've made some horrible judgments of our own. We've trusted frauds and been skeptical about genuinely sincere people. My grandmother developed a real gift of getting it backwards. She nearly always trusted the people that wanted to take her to the cleaners, and was suspicious toward everyone that truly had her best interests at heart.

Man is so fallible, so prone to error, so limited in information, that you would think we would have taken Jesus' suggestion long ago and just given up any form of judgment whatsoever. Yet, most of us have made little or no progress at taming our judgmental natures.

Jesus was not saying anything the Rabbis had not already insisted upon. They put thinking the best about someone as one of the six great works that man could do. They saw that particular kindness as nothing less than a sacred duty. Jesus was affirming this to be true. We should refrain from judging, not only because we so often fail to judge correctly, but also because we are so limited in the information we need to judge rightly.

Hillel the famous Rabbi said, "Do not judge a man until you yourself have come into his circumstances or situation." —Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

We will never know the power of temptations in another's life. Nor can we know all the circumstances that shaped their strengths and weaknesses, or the present influences. I'm sure at one time or another we have all thought someone was rude because we did not know that they were experiencing a traumatic loss in their life. If we happened to find out what was troubling them, we felt convicted for even letting that thought cross our mind.

We should refrain from judging because it is impossible for us to be impartial. We are easily swayed by our instincts or unreasonable influences. We see facial features that remind us of someone who has been cruel to us in our past. We interpret expressions incorrectly. Even our mood and current attitude can shade our opinion.

"...when the Greeks held a particularly important and difficult trial, they held it in the dark so that judge and jury would not even see the man on trial, and so would be influenced by nothing but the facts of the case."

But we don't have the advantage of turning out the lights or hearing all the facts.

It is Jesus who gives us the best reason to not judge. First, He warns us, *"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* Jesus warns that the way we judge and the measure we judge with will be applied toward us. As humans, we tend to be the most judgmental toward the things that tempt us personally. The Apostle Paul expressed it like this, *"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."* Romans 2:1 (NIV)

I get a chuckle out of all the back and forth in the political build up toward the election, as this point seems so obvious. One ad points the finger and says, "You did this!" The counter ad says, "Actually, it was you who did it!" Back and forth it goes, judging one another of the things they are guilty of themselves. That is our nature. That is our tendency, but it means we will be judged by the same standard we have used.

You've heard me say before that this verse makes me want to find the biggest measure of grace and mercy and apply it to everyone, because that is what I want applied to me. When we realize that this is God's loving warning, we will act like we believe it. Until then, we will go on judging others and condemning ourselves. Even though I realize this is the case, it seems every time my mouth opens without praying first, some judgmental statement pops out. Some critical word about another soul for whom Christ died escapes from my lips. I have to go to the Lord, ask for forgiveness, and ask for His generous attitude to fill my heart. The flesh is always ready to put people down, but the Spirit always desires to encourage and lift up.

Jesus next reason not to judge is that there is enough need for correction in our own life; we don't need to look for problems in others. Jesus put it in this humorous way, ³*"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"* ⁴*How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the*

speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

If you see a need in someone's life, take a look at your own first. Is your only motive to truly help them? Get your own situation squared away first, and then you will be able to help. The reason we recognize the problem in someone else is often because we are so familiar with it in our own life. If we haven't learned how to overcome it by the grace of God, how can we give advice to anyone else with the same problem?

The Apostle Paul had to address a conflict in the church in Rome. Some thought it was OK to do a certain things and others thought a Christian shouldn't do that thing. (Romans 14:2-5) People were seeing specks in their brother's eye. It doesn't matter what the speck was, it is only important to know it wasn't something God plainly forbids in His Word. Paul asks, "Who are you to judge another man's servant? He has to answer to his Master, not to you." The family of God must answer to their Master, Jesus. We can sometimes try to convince people against their personal convictions. Paul had a great attitude in regards to people seeing things differently. He said if it were necessary, God would reveal it to them. (Philippians 3:15) Can we trust God to reveal to our brothers that there is a speck in their eye? That will save us a lot of unnecessary conflict. Let us look to our own hearts first as Jesus commanded.

There are times when the elders of a church have to address a problem in a person's life. Even then, they are warned to look at themselves carefully, as they may be tempted by that same sin. (Galatians 6:1) We don't judge by comparing ourselves with one another. In fact, we are told not to do that. (2 Corinthians 10:12) Instead, we are told to compare our lives with the one true standard, the very nature of God. Then we realize that we are all so far short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) From that position, we all desire the help of one another as we continue this journey of growth in Christ.

Jesus is really addressing our human tendency to look at others as we avoid our own compromises and selfishness. It continues the thought of the last chapter that the inner life is where our concern and effort needs to be placed. Are we living for external things, or for the inner life that can transform the outer life? Are we living for what matters, or have we fallen for some worthless substitute?

God is seeking broken, humble, fallible, surrendered men and women to work in and through. (2 Chronicles 16:9) That is not squelching your personality, but releasing it to be all it was created to be. It is impossible for any of us to fathom the good that God could do through just one completely surrendered soul whose personality was completely fulfilled in Christ. Jesus exemplified that kind of life, and we cannot fathom the good that will ultimately result from it. Every man or woman of God we look up to was great to the extent that they surrendered themselves to Christ and then found what He had designed them to be. I hope that you see God's intentions for you are vastly greater than any selfish thing you could desire in this world. The surrendered soul is the kind of person that is willing to help others only after examining their own heart.

Commented [notes1]: ²One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.
³The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.
⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.
⁵One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.
Romans 14:2-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ¹⁵All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.
Philippians 3:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.
Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ¹²For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.
2 Corinthians 10:12 (KJV)

Commented [notes5]: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
Romans 3:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ⁹For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.
2 Chronicles 16:9 (NIV)

The verse that follows brings up all the problems that man has in judging others, but when we keep it in context with the passage, it is not only prophetic, but it makes perfect sense.

⁶"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces."

Jewish Christians used it to exclude Gentile converts from their worship services. That doesn't fit the passage. The Early Church used it to exclude young converts from communion. That doesn't fit the passage either. Both interpretations seem to entirely miss the point. To the Jew, a Gentile was a dog, but not to Jesus. He used the term once to test the Syro-phonician woman, but nothing in His actions or other teachings indicate He thought this way. He marveled at the faith of Gentiles and said one man had expressed more faith than any Israelite. Who, then, is Jesus referring to?

Let's look at another warning from Jesus to see if we find a parallel. To me, this is like a treasure hunt. Every word from Jesus' lips has instruction and truth that we can apply to our daily life as we live with and in Him.

¹"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. ²They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. ³They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. John 16:1-4a (NIV)

Jesus warned that people would be so convinced that His disciples were wrong that they would believe that killing them was offering God service.

Now listen to Jesus explanation of why some can't receive His sacred words and pearls of wisdom.

⁴³You don't understand what I say, because you cannot accept my teaching. ⁴⁴You belong to your father the devil, and you want to do what he wants. He was a murderer from the beginning and was against the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he shows what he is really like, because he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵But because I speak the truth, you don't believe me. ⁴⁶Can any of you prove that I am guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?

⁴⁷The person who belongs to God accepts what God says. But you don't accept what God says, because you don't belong to God." John 8:43-47 (NCV)

This applies to all nationalities and religions. If anyone will not hear the truth that is set before them, that is the dog or pig in our passage for today. Jesus was warning His disciples not to try to present the truth to those who refuse to hear. His later predictions said it would be their Jewish brothers that could not hear, that would turn and trample them. It happened time and time again in synagogue after synagogue. The dogs were Jewish, Roman, Greek, Gaul, Brit, educated and uneducated. It is anyone who with animosity refuses the word and love of God. That is not judging them; it is their actions declaring their own judgment.

In our passage, the best case would be someone seeing a speck in order to try to help them. In the worse case, they are just being critical. If they really intend to help, they must first pull the plank out of their eye, then they can offer humble assistance to another. But, Jesus warns, don't offer that sacred help, that precious pearl, to

someone who has no desire to hear it and be changed. You will be abused for it, verbally and sometimes even physically. Jesus is telling us we don't have to do that. When there is a rejection of the word, not of you personally, but of the truth of the word, you need not persist. It will only bring them more condemnation and animosity toward the Gospel. It is one thing to be rejected because of something about us; we must overlook that. People can reject you because of other "Christians" poor examples. We should overlook that as well. But if it is God's word they do not want to hear, we are free to move on.

Be sensitive toward others when the Lord opens a door to speak the truth to help them. Argument may just be an invitation to present more of the truth, but a clear-cut rejection of the Word of God means the person is not yet ready and may never be. The Holy Spirit has yet to create a hunger in that heart to receive the Word that might help remove that speck.

I want to close this message with the recasting of the vision the Lord has laid on my heart for Wayside. It is connected with this passage. I long to see us truly develop into a spiritual family that is willing to love the Lord with abandon. If we can put Him first in our lives, He will be first in everything we desire for this church. He will be first in all our activities and efforts. Then we can truly give of ourselves to love one another first. We can act from a genuine desire to give our best to one another.

I'm afraid that we are so busy with our own lives that we have forgotten that we are truly a spiritual family. Our fellowship just seems like such minor part of our lives, when it should be such a major part. The small groups have been a real help drawing us together, and Barbara's dinners, but I see us going much deeper into Christ, in humility and love. Some of the ladies who pray together are going to keep the church open on Saturdays so that those passing by can come in and pray or be prayed for. These are all wonderful things I believe the Lord wants us to do, but I can't get over the impression that the Lord is calling our hearts deeper into loving Him first and then one another as family in Christ.

I'm not sure that there is anything we can do to move this along but to pray and offer our hearts. It has to be a supernatural work of the Spirit. I'm continuing to pray for you to have a Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know Jesus better. And I pray that you may have the power with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. I trust that you are continuing to pray for me to be given the words to speak, boldness to speak freely, and protection from the enemy.

As we've seen in our passage today, let's not judge anyone, but think the best and encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25), and consider others better than ourselves, as the Apostle Paul encouraged us to. (Philippians 2:3) And let's continue to pray and believe that God wants to do a transforming work here at Wayside, making this a real family in Christ that touches this community with His love.

Commented [notes7]: ²⁵Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.
Philippians 2:3 (NIV)