

“Checking our Attitudes”

Matthew 7:1-12

As Jesus is working His way through His message to the masses on the mountain, He has, on one hand, been building up the poor, oppressed, disabled and devalued of society and showing them He and God have not cursed them but a small yet wealthy and powerful group of people called the Pharisees had cursed them (John 7:49). So He has encouraged them and told them God wants to bless them.

On the other hand, Jesus has also pointed out that to put first the Kingdom of God in your life means to put God's purposes and ways ahead of your own. To put away with anger towards others. To guard your eyes and heart from lust. To forgive others who have hurt you, to love those who hurt you and pray for them. To be honest and follow through on your promises. To pray, give and fast for God's glory not for man's applause. To invest in your eternal future more than your temporal one. To trust God for the basic needs of your life as you seek to come under His rule as well as help others believe in Jesus before He comes to rule.

This is a very freeing message on one hand and yet a higher standard to live by in regards to God. As Jesus moves towards giving His hearers a choice, He comes to a touchy area that we are guilty of. The religious leaders had misjudged and mislabelled the poor and disabled as those whom God has rejected. As wrong as they were Jesus now tells His hearers don't act the same way towards others as the Pharisees did. Don't judge others without knowing the facts and motives.

Matthew 7:1 is often used to warn us not to judge others. Unfortunately, that's not exactly what Jesus said. That's just the first half of v.1 and v.1 is part of a larger section (vv.1-12) that is often overlooked when trying to understand what Jesus said and meant. So to only say 'Don't judge' is to misquote Scripture because we've left out the rest. And when we misquote Scripture we misunderstand Scripture. And when we misunderstand Scripture we misapply Scripture. If we then want to know how to apply this passage we need to observe what it says first then find what it meant to Jesus' audience.

V. 1 is only half a sentence in the original and v.1 introduces a paragraph that ends at v.6. Let's read this as a unit:

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For 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? 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? ⁵ You 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 turn and tear you to pieces.

So, when we understand the paragraph here's what Jesus is telling us – Jesus says,

We Need to Judge Graciously
(7:1-6)

Jesus tells us how to make wise assessments as opposed to misinformed and critical judgments about people's characters. The word for "judge" means to come to a conclusion about someone as if you alone have the authority to do so. Sadly, we are all guilty of doing this without all the information. The Pharisees were brutally guilty of this while pretending to be spiritually sensitive to God. Jesus judged them as hypocrites and He was correct in His assessment because He had all the information. But He didn't want His followers to be like them. So He warns us,

Don't condemn without evidence (v.1)

James, the step brother of Jesus, echoes many of Jesus' statements in the sermon on the mount. In James 4:11-12 we read,

¹¹ Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

If we're honest a lot of our 'judging' is where we essentially take God's place and borders on slanderous, our intention is to belittle someone else while making ourselves seem wiser. This is what Jesus is getting at, the critical, negative, presumptuous assessments we make of people without knowing the background or their motivation. How often have we come to false conclusions about someone because we didn't have all the information?

Chuck Swindoll recalls an incident when he was the guest speaker at a week-long retreat. On the first day of the conference he met a nice couple who were glad to be there and looking forward to his teaching ministry. As the week wore on, Chuck noticed that the husband fell asleep at every one of his teaching presentations. This bothered him. He began to think this guy was spiritually immature and other thoughts. When his last session was over, the man's wife approached Chuck. Chuck thought to himself that she was going to apologize for her unspiritual husband who probably was dragged to be there. Instead she said, 'My husband and I want to thank you for your teaching this week. It was his idea to come here this week. Actually, it was his final wish to hear you speak. He loves the Lord and enjoys your teaching. But he's dying of cancer and will probably only last a few more weeks. The medication he's on makes him very sleepy and he finds that embarrassing. I just want you to know how much this week meant to him.' Chuck wrote that he had never been more rebuked and wrong about another brother.

'Do not judge so that you will not be judged.' Jesus doesn't say who will judge us. I think we can safely assume God but I think we can also add that the way we judge and treat others will also be how people treat us. That shouldn't surprise us. If we know someone who is gracious and kind and rarely says anything negative about others, we will be less likely to criticize them. If we hear anything negative we probably give them the benefit of the doubt. This is what Jesus says we should do for everyone in v.2,

Be generous when you measure the situation (v.2)

² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

When Jesus uses the word measure His Jewish audience picks up a cultural metaphor. When you bought something in the market it was weighed on a scale with an equal weighted object on the other side of the scale. If you wanted a pound of beans the shopkeeper would measure your beans or product and when the two became equal he would measure you just a little more than the weight.

This was what it meant to give a generous measurement, to give them more than they deserved, to cut them a little slack to give them the benefit of the doubt. A well-known Rabbinic saying at the time of Jesus was 'Judge each person with the scales weighed in their favour.' If a person is late, don't presume they were insensitive or scatter-brained, but instead assume something happened to make them late and maybe even pray they are fine. How do we usually react when something like that happens? Do we judge the person with the scales in their favour or do we immediately push the scale right down and say 'What's their problem now?'

Being generous is a good way to react to people when we're unsure of why they did what they did or didn't do what they should have. Another excellent reaction and step to take is in vv.3-5,

Judge your own sins before others' flaws (vv.3-5)

Perhaps His disciples chuckled when Jesus gave this exaggerated illustration of someone totally oblivious to a log coming out their eye trying to tell another to get rid of that tiny sliver in their eye! But it's not funny when it happens, when we criticize others while ignoring our own flaws and sins, that are fairly obvious to the rest of those around us.

There's a couple of things that Jesus wants us to work on when it comes to seeing our sins before others' flaws;

Stop negative searching (vv.3-4)

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?"

Our problem is we are sometimes looking for the negative in people. We are too quick to point out flaws and come to negative judgments without the evidence. It's a form of pride to find flaws in others; it's an attempt to make ourselves look good. If that's a problem we have we need to stop searching for the negative in people and look for the positive aspects of their character. Weigh the scales in their favour.

When we are looking for the negative in others and ignoring our own character flaws and sins we become what the Pharisees were; hypocrites. Jesus says,

Avoid being a hypocrite (v.5)

Jesus accuses us of being a hypocrite when we make negative judgments about others while ignoring our own sins. A hypocrite, as we saw in Ch. 6, was an actor. One who with a mask pretended to be someone they were not so they could get the applause of people. Isn't that what we're doing when we criticize others while ignoring our own flaws; inadvertently looking for their applause/approval? Jesus doesn't only call the Pharisees hypocrites.

He pointed out their flaws because He had all the information. But at the same time, He said, don't be like them; that doesn't help them change. Criticizing people for their bad behaviour or their sins doesn't help them change, does it? How do you respond to people when they point out a flaw or sin in your life and they are not very gracious? We get annoyed. We get angry and defensive. We may even shoot back a snide remark at them and point out a negative characteristic in their life. Does that help us mature in Jesus? No.

This is what v.6 refers to. Dogs and pigs were not friendly pets in Jesus' day. The dogs of Jesus' day were wild and vicious street animals. Pigs were boars that would bite if you weren't careful. Don't give dogs something sacred that they don't understand or need or pearls to pigs which they can't eat. If you give a wild, hungry animal something it can't handle and doesn't need and can't value what's it going to do to you? It's going to attack and bite.

That's what people do when we judge them critically and hypocritically; they bite back because we didn't

Give them what they needed (v.6)

We all need correction. None of us is perfect. We all have character flaws. Jesus is not saying ignore the sins of others. There are many verses where we are commanded to do just that.

Matt. 18:15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.

James 5:19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

1 Cor. 5:11 But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

¹² What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³ God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."

And we have many examples in the Bible of prophets confronting kings and people about their sins. But Jesus is speaking about a wrong way in vv.1-6 and a better way in vv.7-12. What should we do? Since spiritual growth and maturity is a work of God through his Spirit then shouldn't we pray to God about them?

⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

While these verses can stand alone as a great illustration and message on persistent prayer, the reason why we know Jesus is still talking about beware of judgmental attitudes is He's still talking about in v.12 and the illustration of God as our father who treats us as sinners who don't deserve to be treated with the grace He treats us with. The reason why we need to check our attitudes and stop acting as if we're God and making (uninformed) judgments on others is because . . .

We are Treated Graciously by God **(7:7-11)**

If we sense a need to talk to someone about sin, let's deal with our own first. And let's not do it harshly because that's not what any of us needs; we need to be shown grace and kindness in our sin so we respond better. So we need to pray about this. And the persistence in prayer is probably

alluding to the fact that we need to take some time to pray about this before we do it. That gives us some time to reflect on our own sins and flaws too as well as a gracious way of doing it.

Jesus uses the words 'seek, knock and ask' for prayer. It's not a coincidence that He uses 'seek' since He just told us to 'seek first the Kingdom of God and His right way of doing things' as opposed to the unbelievers who seek to be satisfied in the things of the world. So perhaps Jesus was telling us to

Keep asking God for the qualities that He blesses (vv.7-8)

Like? Pray for the one who needs to see their sin that they would be poor in spirit (realize their sins and lack of ability to be right with God). Or pray that they would have pure hearts and hunger and thirst for righteousness and that they would be merciful to others and mourn over their sins and the sins of our world. If God blesses us for displaying these qualities, should we not pray this for each other? And would not a hunger for God's blessing result in our seeing our own sins and flaws?

What convinces me that these verses are still in the context of looking for solutions to our judgmental attitudes is v.11.

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

We are sinners by nature, yet God is gracious to us. He even answers our prayers.

Be humbled that He answers your prayers (vv.10-11)

Even an earthly father is not so cruel that he would give his child a stone instead of bread or a snake instead of a fish. And yet, our perfect heavenly Father listens to our prayers in spite of our judgmental attitudes at times. He is patient with us. He is gracious to us. Jesus tells us to discern graciously because God treats us graciously. Therefore, He sums it up in v.12 by saying,

Treat Others the Way God Treats Us **(7:12)**

Now this verse makes even more sense since we see how it concludes this whole section on not becoming a judgmental hypocrite like the Pharisees. Jesus told us to pray for and love our enemies at the end of Ch. 5. Now He says the same thing again here. Don't be like those who refuse to see the log in their own eye but are quick to see the splinter in ours. Pray for them. Treat them the way God wants you to treat them. But didn't Jesus say "*treat them the same way you want to be treated*"? Yes, but He concluded that with "*for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*" Because that's always been the way God has taught us to treat others; His way with grace towards sinful, not always obedient people.

Jesus commands us to stop negatively drawing conclusions about people without information as if we are God ourselves. He does say, when we need to point out sin in other people's lives, make sure we've prayed about it for a while, that we've searched our own hearts for our own sins and to do so in a gracious way; a way that we would be open to receiving well.

Remember,

2 Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net