To Judge or Not to Judge: A Very Important Question

Matthew 7:1-6

Introduction: 1) It is, without question, one of the most well-known and often quoted verses from the Bible in the 21st century. People who know very little of the Bible’s content know this verse. It is like a bullet ready to be fired at a moment’s notice: “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (*KJV*). And yet, though this verse is often quoted, it is also often misunderstood and misapplied. Does Jesus really mean we are to never be discerning, evaluate someone’s actions, judge someone’s behavior? That He does not mean this is immediately obvious by just reading the Sermon on the Mount! In chapter 6 Jesus repeatedly called out the Pharisees and scribes as “hypocrites” (6:2, 5, 16). He will repeatedly do this again and again in the remainder of Matthew’s gospel (15:7; 22:18; 23:1, 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). In 7:6 he refers to certain people as dogs and pigs! In 7:15 he warns us of false teachers describing them as ravaging wolves who come in sheep’s clothing. All of this sounds like acts of judgment to me!

2) No, I think Jesus clearly has something different in mind; the difference between acts of judgment and an attitude of judgementalism. God’s people are certainly called by the Lord to call sin, sin. We are certainly called by God to discern good from evil, right from wrong, good fruit from bad fruit (7:17). What we are not called to do is judge people’s motives, look down on people with a self-righteous judgmental spirit. My friend Don Carson is very helpful in this context, and his words provide a fitting introduction to our study of these six verses. He writes, “It is easy to see how powerful and dangerous the temptation to be judgmental can be. The challenge to be holy has been taken seriously, and a fair degree of discipline, service and formal obedience have been painstakingly won. Now, I tell myself, I can afford to look down my long nose at my less disciplined peers and colleagues. Or perhaps I have actually experienced a generous measure of God’s grace, but somehow I have misconstrued it and come to think that I have earned it. As a result I may look askance at those whose vision, in my view, is not as large as my own; whose faith is not as stable; whose grasp of the deep truths of God not as masterful; whose service record is not as impressive (in men’s eyes, at least); whose efforts have not been as substantial. These people are diminished in my eyes; I consider their value as people inferior to my own value.” (Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, 97-98).

Jerry Bridges refers to judgmentalism as one of those “respectable sins” (ch. 17 in *Respectable Sins*). Jesus helps us see that there is nothing respectable about it at all.

1. Jesus warns us about being judgmental toward others 7:1-5
* Jesus confronts the issue of being judgmental head on. He addresses it biblically, theologically and practically. Bottom-line: he tells us it is dangerous (7:1), detrimental (7:2), dysfunctional (7:3-4) and self-deceptive (7:5). You attempt to play God when you are not. You apply to others a standard you do now want applied to yourself. And, your spiritual vision is blurred. You lose perspective and fail to see reality as it really is.
* Jesus said in John 13:35, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciple, if you love one another.” God’s people should be known for how sincerely they love one another, not how severely they judge one another. Jesus highlights three negative aspects of a judgmental spirit in verses 1-5.
1. It is foolish 7:1-2
* Jesus once again raises the issue of being a hypocrite (6:2, 5, 16; 7:5). His words are direct and forceful. They have teeth. “Do not judge” is a present imperative of command. It may be a call to stop an action already taking place (Quarles, 284). Stop judging now and don’t judge in the future captures the thrust of His command. What is the rationale for this strong and abrupt statement? He tells us, “so that you won’t be judged.” Verse two amplifies and clarifies exactly the point Jesus is making, “For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judged others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use.” The principle Jesus articulates finds its echo in Matthew 6:12, 14-15 and our Lord’s teaching on forgiveness. Quarles says, “Jesus taught that a person should expect to be treated by God in a manner similar to the one in which he has treated others. If a person forgives others, he can expect to be forgiven by God. If he refuses to forgive others, he can expect God to withhold His forgiveness…. Matthew 7:1 repeats and rephrases the principle expressed in these earlier statements. If a person judges others harshly, he can expect harsh judgment from God. However, if he judges others mercifully, he can expect merciful judgment from God” (Quarles, 284).
* Showing mercy to others is an act of wisdom that flows out of a recognition of the mercy God has shown us. Judging harshly is the act of a fool and reveals you don’t understand God’s grace at all. Sinclair Ferguson says it perfectly, “The heart that has tasted the Lord’s grace and forgiveness will always be restrained in its judgment of others. It has seen itself deserving judgment and condemnation before the Lord and yet, instead of experiencing his burning anger, has tasted his infinite mercy” (Ferguson, 153).
1. It is prideful 7:3-4
* Jesus provides a memorable example that has become colloquial to this day: the splinter in the brother’s eye verses the log in your own eye! Jesus puts it in the form of a question: “Why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye but don’t notice the beam of wood in your own eye?” This is humorous but it is also pointed, direct and convicting. Your brother has a small splinter in his eye but you have “a beam of wood” in yours, and you are going to try and help (correct!) him? Really? Verse four follows up with a second question: “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ and look, there’s a beam of wood in your own eye?” This question drives home the point, asking in essence, how can you even attempt to do this? Why would you even try?
* Those who take on the assignment of spiritual Peeping Tom, spiritual garbage inspector, spiritual Gestapo are deaf, dumb, and blind to the enormity and magnitude of their own sin. Ferguson says, “So deeply has his sin conquered him that he has become blind to it. Sensitive to sin in others, he has been desensitized to the sin in his own heart” (Ferguson, 152).
* Perhaps there is no greater example of this in all of the Bible than the day the prophet Nathan confronted King David over his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1-17). The confrontation ended with the stinging indictment, “You are the man” (2 Sam. 12:1-7). Before we burn in our hearts with unrighteous anger toward others, we would do ourselves a big spiritual favor by ruthlessly inspecting our own heart and lives first. We may discover there is a log in our eye.
1. It is hypocritical 7:5
* That someone with great sin in their life would attempt to correct someone with a small sin in theirs is the height of hypocrisy. On this point Jesus leaves no doubt. “*Hypocrita*” our Lord shouts! “First,” perform eye surgery on yourself. “Take,” remove, “the beam of wood out of your eye.” The word “take” is another imperative. It is a command that calls for immediate and decisive action. Do it, and do it now is the idea. Then, and only then, “you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye.” Now, there is an important truth we must not miss. Jesus does affirm the rightness of humbly and graciously correcting a brother or sister in sin. It is right and proper to do so. The issue is I first must deal with me. Having first dealt with my sin, I am now in a position to rightly help others, something the Bible clearly commends and even commands (Gal. 6:1-2). Inspection of others without introspection of myself is the road to playing the hypocrite. We must lovingly correct a brother or sister enslaved to sin. We will do it, however, compassionately and humbly ever aware of the lurking danger of arrogance, pride and self-deception. Spurgeon says it well, “After we are ourselves sanctified, we are bound to be eyes to the blind, and correctors of unholy living; but not till then” (Commentary on Matthew, 70).
1. Jesus counsels us to judge those who live wickedly 7:6
* Jesus now does a 180 in verse six. He also brings balance and clarity to what he has just said in verses 1-5. The words once more are extremely strong and can be troubling to our modern, politically correct ears, where morally we have come to believe virtually anything goes. How dare you compare someone to a dog or pig! However John Stott is right, “Jesus always called a spade a spade. His outspokenness led him to call Herod Antipas ‘that fox’ and hypocritical scribes and Pharisees ‘whitewashed tombs’ and a ‘brood of vipers.’ Here he affirms that there are certain human beings who act like animals and may therefore be accurately designated ‘dogs’ and ‘pigs’” (*The* *Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 180). Carson helpfully adds, “after warning us against judgmentalism, Jesus warns us against being undiscriminating, especially in our choice of people to whom we present the wonderful riches of the gospel. However, in seeking to do full justice to this warning in 7:6, we ought not fail to note that five verses are reversed for judgmental people, and only one for undiscerning people. The ratio reflects an accurate assessment of where the greater danger lies” (*The* *Sermon on the Mount*, 104).
* So, why do we not “give what is holy to dogs or toss pearls before pigs?” Jesus gives us two reasons.
1. Some tear up God’s precious truth
* “Dogs” in verse six are not cute, cuddly domesticated pets we might have in the house to play with the children. They were wild packs that roamed the streets. They were scavengers, vicious and dangerous. They may be false teachers that Paul warns us about in Philippians 3:2. They are the type of persons the apostle John puts side by side with, “the sorceress, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” in Revelation 22:15. These are evil and wicked persons who despise the gospel of Jesus Christ and the truths of Holy Scripture, that which is “holy.”
* What do such people do with God’s precious truth? They rip it to shreds. Jesus actually personalizes their response telling us that they will “tear you to pieces.” Their goal is certainly to destroy the message and sometimes the messenger as well. Jesus warned us of this in Matthew 5:10-12.
* Practically Jesus is warning us not to force the gospel on those who are not only not receptive, but are actually hostile to our witness. Cynics and mockers will seldom listen. Move on and seek out receptive ears. Otherwise you run the risk of ravenous and savage dogs tearing you apart verbally and even literally.
1. Some trample God’s precious truth

Pigs were unclean animals according to the Old Testament (Levt. 11:7; Deut. 14:8). They are never spoken of positively in scripture. In 2 Peter 2:22 they, along with dogs, are images for false teachers. If dogs attack the messenger pigs trample the message. Here the gospel is described as pearls (cf. Matt. 13:45-46). Pigs have an inability to recognize the beauty and value of the pearls of biblical truth. They see it, ascribe to it no value, and trample it under their feet and drag it through the mud. They don’t just reject it, they seek to destroy it. Quarles is perceptive in his comment, “Just as dogs will fail to show proper reverence for sacrificial meat and pigs will fail to value precious pearls, the wicked will fail to value and show reverence for the message about the kingdom. On the contrary, they will only spurn, mock and ridicule it” (Quarles, 293).

* The phrase “don’t give” has the force of an imperative. The idea is something like “never give,” “never do this.” Again, Jesus is his own best commentary on what he means in Matthew 10:11-15 when He says, “When you enter any town or village, find out who is worthy, and stay there until you leave. Greet a household when you enter it, and if the household is worthy, let your peace be on it; but if it is unworthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone does not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable on the Day of Judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.” Jesus does not tell us to judge in advance who will receive or reject the gospel. Only God knows the human heart. We offer the good news to all with discrimination. However, when it is rejected and rejected with adamancy and force, we must move on. Others will hear and they will believe. It is our calling to go and find them. Spurgeon again is helpful, “You are not to judge, but you are not to act without judgment…. Saints are not to be simpletons; they are not to be judges, but, also, they are not to be fools” (Spurgeon, 70).

Conclusion: I want to be both helpful and practical as we conclude our study on being judgmental. How can those of us who have been redeemed from all of our sin by the precious blood of Christ rightly make judgments without wrongly being judgmental? Let me share some thought for our consideration.

1. Check your motives. Why am I doing this? Have I checked my heart knowing that ultimately only God knows the motives and intentions of the heart (Prov. 16:2; 1 Cor. 4:3-5)?
2. Examine your own walk with the Lord first. Am I walking in the Spirit, characterized by a gentle spirit, careful to monitor my own sin (Gal. 6:1-2)?
3. Seek out before acting the wisdom of God’s word and godly counsel (Prov. 10:13, 10:14, 11:14; 15:22).
4. Practice the “Golden Rule.” Think about how you would want to be treated if it was you on the receiving end of correction (Matt. 7:12).
5. Be careful to not make a snap decision or quick judgment. Take the time to get the facts and listen before taking action (Prov. 18:13).
6. Pray for the one who appears to be caught in sin before correcting them (James 5:15-16).
7. Don’t forget the example of Jesus and how He helped and ministered to sinners. Jesus was condemned and ridiculed for the way He cared for and loved sinners, tax collectors, pagans and the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11).
8. Speak the truth, but do it in love (Eph. 4:15).
9. Keep in mind that some things are right and wrong, but some things are just different! (Rom. 14:1-6, 13-23).
10. Never forget that ultimately everyone must give an account to the Lord, not to me! (Rom, 14:7-12; 2 Cor. 5:10).