



Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Series: The Manifesto of the King, Part 23: Judge Not...

Matthew 7:1-6

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Introduction: Today we are entering the last phase of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has already spent a great deal of time developing and explaining the nature of the true Christian's character, his conduct, his impact on the world, the true righteousness that should be evident in a believer, and the chief pursuit of his soul. Now, Jesus will shift his focus to relationships. How, in light of these words, instructed by these words are we to relate to our brothers and sisters in Christ, to rejecters of God's truth, to God our Father, to false prophets, and to Christ Himself. That is the focus of this last section of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus begins today with one of the most often quoted and most misunderstood texts in all of Scripture. Of course I am referring to these words of Jesus: "Judge not that you be not judged."

More than any other passage, save for John 3:16, this text is ripped out of its context, and it is used as a shield to protect and to justify all manner of sin and wickedness. It makes sense too, doesn't it? Of course a society, like our own, which has jettisoned any concept of absolute truth, any absolute standard of right and wrong, would love these words. If you just completely pull them out of context, it makes it sound like Jesus is all about mutual slackness and softness when it comes to truth and its application to our lives.

These words from Jesus have been twisted by many to mean that "good" Christians should never exercise any critical judgment or biblical discernment, that a "good" Christian is one who tolerates everything and does it with a smile, totally accepting of everything and of every view and of all ideas of morality. "Good" Christians are to refrain from making any moral judgments or taking any stands because that is intolerant and we all know that at the heart of "good" Christianity is acceptance of all people and of all things, indiscriminately. A lot of people really believe that garbage.

From the world's perspective, the ideal Christian, and especially the ideal pastor, is an undiscerning, morally flabby, indulgent, tolerant, biblically ignorant, all-accepting jellyfish who lives out this misinterpretation of "Judge not" -- a person who has a flabby and indulgent attitude toward anyone who uses the designation of Christian or who claims to believe in God.

And you know what, so rampant is the confusion and the misapplication and the sinful desire to manipulate these words to soften Christ's commands that there are a host of professing Christians, who desperately want this to be the meaning of Jesus' words here. No accountability, no responsibility, no answerability to live a life worthy of the gospel, no judging at all but being easy, indulgent, and tolerant, allowing almost anything for the sake of unity or to avoid hurt feelings. . How often have we ourselves or defended our sin or the sin of another? Now often have we heard others defending their sin? How often have we heard professing disciples defend the aberrant doctrine of their favorite pseudo-Christian teacher by saying: "Don't judge. Jesus said we aren't supposed to judge. You can't judge me. You have no right to judge me." We hear it all the time. It is used like a get-out-of-jail-free card. And all of this points to a monumental confusion with what Jesus is saying in this text. And this lack of understanding of what this text means and a refusal to understand it in the context of Christ's sermon and in the overall teaching of the Scriptures has had a devastating impact on the purity of churches in America. There are churches that tolerate all manner of sin and turn a blind eye to obvious rejection of Christ's words under the guise of being non-judgmental. It is important we understand these words in the context that Jesus meant them. So look with me first at

1) The Warning (v. 1-2) 1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. When Jesus says, "Judge not, that you be not judged", He cannot mean that true Christians are to turn a blind eye to sin and to refuse to discern between good and evil or truth and falsehood. Jesus cannot mean that we are to be spineless, and never to rightly discern or render a righteous judgment. He cannot mean that.

Why do I say that? Here's why. I say that because of context -- both in this sermon that Jesus is preaching and of the whole of God's Word. First, the entire context of this sermon calls for judgment, for discernment, for evaluating between what is true discipleship, what is true holiness, what is true godly character and what is not. For us to be obedient to the commands of the Sermon on the Mount requires that we rightly discern between righteousness and

hypocrisy in ourselves and in others. Jesus Himself has been judging the Pharisees and Scribes as He has been preaching these words to His disciples. He has shown the error of their teaching and their failure to understand and rightly interpret and apply the Word of God to themselves and warned His disciples not to follow their corrupt example.

Second, Jesus requires his disciples to make proper judgments. For example, in verse 6, Jesus says: “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.” He calls on them to discern the character of men and women and to identify dogs and pigs – that requires judgment. In verses 15-20, He calls on His disciples to recognize and beware of false prophets – again, that requires judgment. Both of these require critical discernment and evaluation. In chapter 18, Jesus is going to talk about the proper ways to deal with personal sin in the church – that requires of us judgment to identify and then deal with sin.

Third, Jesus elsewhere in John 7, when a crowd misjudges Him because he conducts His healing ministry even on the Sabbath, Jesus does not forbid all judgment by saying – “You have no right to judge me”, instead He says: “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” ” (John 7:24, ESV)

Moreover, consider the greater scope of Scripture. The Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians and forcefully told them to judge one of their members who was engaging in a gross sin. He went on to tell them: (1 Corinthians 5:11–13, ESV) It was the responsibility to discern, or judge, the character of those around them so they could distance themselves those who continued in unrepentant sin. How could the Corinthians do what Paul said without judging the character of another, without forming a conclusion based on observation of their life? In the book of Romans, he says (Romans 16:17–18, ESV) That requires proper judgment. It cannot mean to fail to evaluate things doctrinally. The Apostle John warned his readers (1 John 4:1, ESV) This again, requires right judgment.

Righteous judgment, proper judgment, biblical judgment is a necessity as a child of God, so what is Jesus warning against? He is warning us against unrighteous and improper judgment. The word translated “judge” (krino) refers to inspecting something, to sift through something, to observe something and to come to a conclusion about that thing. It is a neutral word.

Context determines how you are to understand it and the context here, clearly points to unrighteous and improper judgment. Jesus is warning us against judging as the Pharisees and the scribes judged. How did they judge others? They judged in self-righteousness. They judged to make themselves feel superior to others. They judged according to their own established standards and not the standards of the Word of God. They judged with the intent to condemn and destroy. They judged without any mixture of grace or mercy. They judged without any desire to see repentance or renewal. They judged with a hard heart.

Many of the commentators on this verse use the word “ensorious”. We must avoid being censorious. Someone who is censorious is a perpetual fault-finder, hyper-critical, and hateful. They are negative and destructive in the sense that they love to actively seek out other’s failings and they want to do so in order to tear down and to hurt. They delight to assign the worst possible motives without any proof whatsoever. They are most at home when they are criticizing and they take great pleasure in exposing someone’s sin and error. They judge severely and harshly, without any real grounds at all.

Not only are those kinds of people horrible to be around, Jesus’ warning is clear. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. In other words, if you judge for the purpose of condemning, if you without any mixture of grace or mercy, you will receive the exact same kind of judgment from God on the Day of Judgment. Why? Because persisting in this sort of judgmentalism, in this sort of irrational, hyper-critical harshness, without any repentance, is itself an evidence of an unbroken spirit, evidence that we have not ourselves been recipients of God’s grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, evidence that one is not saved by the blood of Christ and can expect only judgment from God the Father. This is a stern and strong warning. Why must Jesus warn us like this? Look at

2) The Rationale (v. 3-4) 3 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? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? Jesus knows human nature doesn’t he? (John 2:25, ESV) Jesus knows what is in us. He knows how we have that tendency to downplay sin in our own lives, to think that our sin isn’t as bad as someone else’s. Jesus knows that we like to make excuses for our sins, to shift the blame to other people, to find ways to minimize or take the edge off our sin. We so often take our own sin less seriously than we do they exact same sin in the lives of other people. Jesus shows us how ludicrous that is.

That is why he is using such exaggerated terms here. He compares the sin in our own lives to a log. That is a word that was used to refer to a beam that was used to support the floor of a house or a huge piece of lumber that was used for building a house. By contrast, you have the speck, a chip, a little sliver by comparison.

What Jesus is getting at is this. As long as there is unrepented sin in our lives, as long as we have sin that we have not resolved biblically – and the biblical resolution of sin is confession and repentance like John tells us in 1 John: (1 John 1:6–9, ESV) – as long as we have sin that we have not resolved biblically, it will keep us from rightly discerning, from rightly judging and interpreting what is going on in someone else’s life. So Jesus is telling us that there is no way that we can deal with the sin in another person’s life while we are harboring sin in our own. We will be like the guy with a huge log in his eye trying to see to remove the speck from someone else’s eye.

Jesus knows whom He is talking to. There are those who regularly pass judgment on someone else without ever examining the sin in their lives. I have been guilty of it and so have you. We all have. By a show of hands, how many of you see this as a real danger in your own lives? Do you judge others for small faults and allow yourself room for great sins? Are you more concerned about your own sins than you are about the sins of others? Do you have a tendency to justify yourself, or do you have a lack of sense of personal need for confession and repentance?

You know, I used to think that the people who needed to hear this passage the most were young people, especially those who were young in Christ and who were just starting to establish their biblical convictions. But I have discovered as a pastor and especially in the last few years, that as fallen sinners, there is no age range that has a monopoly on censorious, nasty, petty attitudes, no age group that has a monopoly on unjust judgment of others. Thankfully, Jesus shows us how we are to

3) Rightly Relate to A Repentant Brother (or Sister) (v. 5) 5 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.

The answer here is not to ignore sin, or to go soft on sin but to rightly deal with sin – first in ourselves and then to help our brother or sister to deal with their sin. Jesus is telling us to deal with our sin first. He is not saying that we have to be sinless – that would be impossible. But what he is saying here is that we should have no unconfessed and unrepented sin. It is my sin that should grab my attention first, not the sin of another. We must deal with our sin as of first importance. That demands regular self-searching and evaluation according to the Word of God. It requires that we regularly be asking God to search us: (Psalm 139:23–24, ESV) Deal with your own sin first, naming it, repenting of it, being broken over it and hating it, applying the blood of Christ and the gospel truth to it, and then you can see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

After dealing with the sin in ourselves first, it is then that we can help our brother or sister to deal with their sin righteously before God. Deal with your own sins and then reprove, rebuke and correct in the way that you would want to be reproved, rebuked and corrected if someone were dealing with you regarding your sin. The assumption is that the desire of both ourselves and our brother or sister is a desire to be submissive to and obedient to Christ and to His commands, that we are both committed to the Lordship of Christ and to His receiving glory through our obedience to Him. Galatians 6 helps us to see how this is to take place: (Galatians 6:1, ESV) That word that is translated here as gentleness is the word of meekness. It does not mean that we go soft on sin or treat it as inconsequential, rather the idea is that we restore a brother in a spirit of submission to Christ, in submission to His Lordship and His Word. That is the idea. We restore in accordance and under submission to the Word of God. The motivation in our hearts should be that our brother or sister would honor the Lord Jesus Christ with the manner of their living and that they would have a fruitful spiritual life, that they would be built up through obedience to the Word of God and that they would be established in a lifestyle of holiness. We approach this as if we are holy ground, because we are.

One of the really beautiful things about living in the body of Christ together is the idea of mutual care and accountability with one another. It is the idea of encouraging and guarding one another in the pursuit of holiness and righteousness. This should not be seen as a negative thing, but as the gracious provision of God to encourage our sanctification. Jesus is telling us to judge righteously, to judge properly, to judge mercifully and graciously. Then the last thing we need to see in this section, Jesus calls us to judge justly and with discernment. He tells us

4) The Right Response to the Outright Rejecter and the Unrepentant Professor (v. 6) 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.” Now what, exactly, is Jesus getting at here? He is calling us to discernment when it comes to the proclaiming the gospel and also applying God’s truth to a person’s life. Look at the words that He uses here and let’s see what Jesus is getting at. He speaks of dogs and pigs.

The dogs that the people of Jesus’ day would have been familiar with would not have been house pets, our canine companions. The word “dogs” would have brought to the minds of his hearers the picture of the wild dogs that scavenged in the rubbish dumps. Pigs, of course, were unclean animals to the Jews. When Jesus says: Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs – He is drawing a very plain picture. A Jew would never give what was holy – meat or food offered in the sacrifice of the temple – to unclean dogs who would not and could not understand its value. Likewise, he would never dream of throwing valuable pearls before pigs. Not only would they be clueless of their worth, they may believe them to be nuts or beans – something edible – and having tried to eat them, would trample them and become enraged and turn and attack the giver.

Metaphorically Jesus is speaking of the gospel, the truth of God, the words of God applied to one’s life. And in that sense, this metaphor has two applications. This command has application in two places – with the outright rejecter of the gospel and with the unrepentant professor of Christ. The title “dogs” and “pigs” can be applied first to those who have had opportunity to hear the gospel, but have decisively, and even mockingly rejected it.

If people have heard the clear declaration of the gospel but refuse to respond to it, if they obstinately reject the gospel, if they mock it and laugh at it and seek only to debate or deride the gospel, if they are vicious and ridiculing and scoffing and jeering and just want to engage you in debate and argument – if they cast themselves in the role of pigs and dogs and trample the gospel, Jesus is telling us to discern that fact and stop engaging them. We cannot lower the gospel to the level of human philosophy or false religions. We cannot cheapen or lessen the gospel in order to gain their approval. The gospel is not up for debate and its truths are not to be treated with such disrespect as to be used as fuel for verbal jousting or like a ping pong ball to be knocked around. You cannot give yourself to that and cannot let the Word of God be treated like that.

What means for dealing with professing believers who persist in sin is this. If there is someone, a professing sister or brother who is in persistent and unrepentant sin, you pursue them with the word of God. You pursue them and entreat them to live according to the gospel, to apply the word of God to their living, to submit themselves to the clear teaching of Scripture. You do it with compassion; you do with the longing for their repentance; you do it desiring to see them turn from their sin. You plead with them; you reason with them from the Word of God; you rebuke them and reprove them. You do it all with a heart to see their repentance and restoration, but if they refuse, if they reject the counsel of the Word of God, if they will not hear your words, if they determine to play the dog, to play the pig, if they are aptly described by Peter's words in 2 Peter 2:22 (ESV) — 22 What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." If they are adamantly set against the counsel of the Word of God and they reject you and even accuse you, and attack you -- then you must let them go. You must turn them over to God that perhaps He might grant them repentance, all the while realizing that there are some who have put themselves beyond correcting. There is nothing else that you can do. You cannot lessen the weight of the Word of God, you cannot compromise the Word of God. We cannot treat what is holy as if it is profane and can be manipulated or ignored as one sees fit. We have nothing else to offer. We cannot pursue them with anything else. We cannot lessen the demands of the gospel or of the Word of God. You're not doing them any favors when you act as if everything is just fine. You may think that you are but in reality, you are placing their souls in peril. You are confirming them in the rebellion. To do so is to commit the sin that Isaiah spoke of in Isaiah 5:20 (ESV)

Do you see? What else could we offer to someone who rejects the application of the Word of God and of the gospel to their lives? How can we make peace with that? The church is not some lovelorn girl who is willing to do anything to get her unfaithful boyfriend to return to her. The church already has a husband – Jesus Christ – and it is Him we are called to please and love supremely. We cannot sacrifice our love and allegiance for Him at the altar of "so-called" concern for someone else. It is not that we do not love those who depart, professing believers who claim to love the gospel but who refuse to have it applied to them. It is not that we do not pity them or love them. We do. That it is why we call them to repentance and submission to Christ. It is not that we do not love them – it is just that we cannot compromise our supreme love for Christ or treat his gift of love, our redemption and the wonderful truths and blessings of the gospel as something to be bartered or compromised or refused.

Beloved, so you see? In both of these cases, what we must recognize is the priceless treasure that the gospel and the truth of God really is. There is no greater truth than the gospel, no greater treasure than God's Word. Nothing is more glorious than the way that God has delivered sinners by the sacrifice of His holy and beloved Son on the cross. Jesus' words here are calling us to remember this fact and treat the gospel and God's Word accordingly. We cannot present the glorious truths of the gospel to those who, in their intellectual arrogance and self-sufficiency and in their love for sin, seek only to mock and argue and ridicule. Neither can we devalue and make little of the commands of God in order to have an appearance of peace or unity with a professing brother or sister who is in sin and who will not repent and submit themselves to it.

But understand, when it comes to this, when we have to let people go and leave them to themselves, we do not go on our way rejoicing and self-satisfied, but with great disappointment and sorrow.

These are hard words from Christ and they require real heart examination on our parts. We must examine ourselves in light of the Word of God and judge rightly.

5) Application questions...

What is the condition of your soul before the Lord? Are you saved?

What is the condition of your discipleship? Are you walking in holiness? Are you judging your sin?

How are you relating to others in the household of God? Are you seeking for mutual edification, rightly discerning sin in your brother's or sister's life, desiring that they would honor the Lord Jesus Christ with the manner of their living and that they would have a fruitful spiritual

life, that they would be built up through obedience to the Word of God and that they would be established in a lifestyle of holiness?

How are you handling God's Word? Do you treat it as the treasure that it is because you treasure Christ as you should?

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