

What Would Jesus Say About Judging?

Matthew 7:1-6; Luke 6:37-38

Preached January 11, 2009 by Dr. Dwight Kilbourne

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye. “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you. (Matthew 7:1-6)

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” (Luke 6:37-38)

Introduction. One afternoon during the time I was off for Christmas, Patty and I brought our granddaughter by the church to show her to everyone who was here. As we were getting out of our van, another family was getting out of their car. As I looked at them, I thought, “I bet they are coming by the church asking for help.” My assessment was based on their appearance and that nothing else was going on at the church at that time. It turns out that they were seeking help.

We are living in an age when tolerance is viewed as one of the highest virtues. To be intolerant is considered by most to be a cardinal sin. In this atmosphere, people have a disdain for being judged by others. “Don’t judge me!” Many in our culture have been turned off to the church and church people because of their perception (which unfortunately has often been a reality) that they are being judged by Christians.

Two books that I would highly recommend to any follower of Christ who is serious about reaching others with the

Good News are *They like Jesus but not the Church* by Dan Kimball and *UnChristian* by David Kinnaman. The authors assert that the perception of the emerging generations is that Christians are judgmental and negative. The authors contend this is a barrier to reaching people who are not yet Christians and we must address the truthfulness of this perception.

Given our cultural setting, Jesus’ words “Do not judge” are refreshing. Given our tendency to judge and the need for moral discernment, his words are challenging. This morning, I invite you to join me in exploring what Jesus is saying about judging.

Judging.

When Jesus used the word “judge,” what did he mean? The particular word used in our text has a range of meanings from “assessing through analysis” to “passing a judgment by a court of law or by God.” When we add the text in Luke that prohibits us from “condemning,” we get the sense of passing a negative judgment about someone. To judge is to declare someone is guilty.

A word used in our culture may be helpful in providing some understanding. The word is “prejudice” – to judge another before the facts are known, to hold an opinion about, regardless of the facts contradicting it, or to hold a hatred toward another group. In many ways, what Jesus is saying here about judging and condemning is akin to prejudice.

A poignant joke I heard years ago fits well into this. A man told his pastor, “I have the gift of discernment. I can tell you what is wrong with everyone and everything.” Unfortunately, I have met a few people who enjoyed exercising that gift. (What is truly sad is I sometimes practice it. By the way, the spiritual gift is “discerning spirits,” that is whether something is of and from God – not what is wrong with a person or thing.)

Jesus warns that each of us will be judged by the same standard we judge others. If we are harsh or judgmental in

our analysis of others, then we will face harsh analysis. If a person is gentle and gracious toward others, then others will be gentle and gracious toward that person. The principle of reciprocity operates in this arena – one reaps what one sows. (Perhaps we should remember the golden rule here: Judge others as you want to be judged.)

One question that is left unanswered by our texts is “who will judge us?” Will we face the same measure of judgment by other people? Or will we face the same measure of judgment by God? While probably both are intended, what Jesus said earlier in the Sermon on the Mount causes us to realize that God will use the measure we use. In speaking about forgiveness, Jesus says if we forgive, God will forgive us. If we fail to forgive, God will not forgive us.

As human beings, we have a tendency to judge people based on how things look and appear. Jesus warned against this: “*Do not judge by appearances*” (John 7:24). Appearance is often very deceiving. We tend to lump appearance into preconceived categories. If we see a person dressed in a particular fashion or doing certain things, we assume certain things about that person – she lacks class, intellect, culture, worth or faith.

Twenty years ago, Howard began attending the church I was serving. His appearance was different than nearly everyone in the pews. He had long grey hair that swept down to the midway point of his back. He always wore an earring – on Sundays it was a dangling cross. He hung out with the “rock music” playing crowd. Despite his appearance, Howard was a sincere follower of Christ and became a dear friend to me. He became one of that church’s most faithful members.

As humans, we also have a tendency to judge based on beliefs and practices. We do this particularly toward other Christian groups and people beyond our faith. For example, some would judge us less than spirit-filled because we use

written liturgies while others would look down on those who don't use written liturgy.

In Romans 14, Paul deals with an issue in a church where people are judging one another based on whether they eat meats or not. He says this is a matter of opinion and preference. In this context, he asks a penetrating question: *Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another?* (4) Each Christian must answer to God for what one does or believes.

Additionally, we often judge based on the actions and lifestyles of others. For example, if one is gay, that person is often categorically condemned by the Christian community. If a person drives a Hummer, she is judged bad by those who have a strong environmental conscience. We tend to base our analysis of others based on what we see them doing or what we perceive they are doing. According to Jesus, there is danger in judging according to appearances, practices and lifestyles.

Moral discernment.

Having heard the warnings about judging, it is important to see there is a balance point. We must be a people who practice moral discernment. Ignoring that which is sinful and harmful is not healthy as well. The New Testament is clear that Christian maturity is marked by being able to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil. (Hebrews 5:14; 1 Corinthians 2:15). We have a role to be a moral compass in our world, always pointing people toward Jesus.

As a matter of fact, Jesus instructs his disciples to "rebuke a sister or brother when they sin" (Luke 17:3). James continues this thought and says that when one turns an errant one around, this covers a multitude of sins (5:19-20).

In the late 18th century, William Wilberforce had a conviction that the slave trade and owning other human beings was morally wrong. His faith in Christ had led him to this conclusion. As a politician, he began to work toward reformation in the British Empire. He spent his life seeking to end the slave trade and slavery and to emancipate the slaves. At the time of his death, his moral dream became a reality. Had it not been for his judgment about

slavery and his speaking to its moral travesty, this may have never happened.

In our text, Jesus' own words give us the point of balance that is needed in the area of judging. In his hyperbolic statement about removing the log from one's eye before removing the speck from another is a statement on how to correct another person. If a person is headed the wrong direction, it is important to work toward correcting that person's course. Doing so in a correct and constructive manner is part of being in community together as Christians.

Coupled with Jesus' statement about judging in Matthew 7 is an interesting parable: "Do not give what is holy to dogs and throw your pearls before swine." There are people who will not appreciate what is precious to us, especially in terms of matters of faith. Not only will some not appreciate, they will ridicule us for what we hold dear. To get into a theological discussion with them is fruitless. To recognize such a person requires a measure of judgment.

Later in this chapter, Jesus warns his hearers to beware of false prophets who are "wolves in sheep's clothing." Again to recognize such a person, requires discernment. It is important to know when such a person is present and seeking leadership within the church.

This matter goes beyond the one who is intentionally sly and destructive. There are those who seek certain roles within the church but have neither the gifts nor the personality to do that ministry. Through my years in ministry, I have seen persons serving as pastors who did much harm to the church because they lacked the gifts to lead a church. Paul warned his readers not to lay hands on any one too quickly (1 Timothy 5:22). All of this requires a level of judgment.

Basically, Jesus said we would recognize these persons by their fruit. Do people's lives produce healthy ministry and disciples? Do they leave a wake of division and strife behind them? Do they demonstrate love, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control? It can be a tricky thing trying to examine the "fruit" because our perspective is often limited. The judging is not to condemn but to correct and to guard.

Personal Posture.

I hope you have a sense that there is a real tension for followers of Jesus Christ when it comes to this issue of judging. We are on the one hand warned by our Lord about judging while on the other informed about its necessity. What should be our personal posture regarding judging?

Perhaps no story better illustrates the proper position than the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery. Her accusers brought her to Jesus for him to pass judgment on her. Her penalty according the Law was death by stoning. After hearing her accusers, Jesus paused for a time. Then he responded, "Let the one without sin cast the first stone." Gradually the crowd dispersed. Jesus spoke to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:1-11).

There are four clues here regarding our posture when it comes to judging.

- Jesus' words to the accusers called them to *test their motives*. They were probably more interested in trapping Jesus than doing what was right. We need to ask ourselves, "What motivates me to think this way toward this person or group?" "Why am I ready to condemn?" "Why am I negative about this matter?"
- Jesus' words to the accusers called them to *take a personal assessment of their own lives*. When we are ready to judge another, we need to look at our own record. What have we done in the past? What are we doing now that is wrong? Gaining perspective on our own faults and failures will impact our reaction to others. Nearly always, it will give us humility as we approach them.
- Jesus' actions show gentleness toward the woman. She is wounded and hurt within. Yet Jesus does not add to her pain. He does not get into her face and ask if it is true. He does not preach her a sermon. He speaks with her in a kind and gentle manner. This is to be our pattern. We are to show gentleness and respect for others, even when they are in the wrong.

- Jesus' response showed her grace – "Neither do I condemn you." He was offering forgiveness and pardon. Yet he also did not excuse her actions but bid her to "sin no more." Grace offers forgiveness and calls for changed living.

Invitation.

In the next two weeks, this sermon series will attempt to address what Jesus would say to conservatives and liberals. This is risky because some in our community of faith would claim to be conservative while others claim to be liberal. We must be careful not to judge one another based on our perspective.

We must be open to dialogue and not judge one another.

Hopefully, this sermon hit home with most of us. Perhaps through it, you were convicted that you are a negative, critical and judgmental person. If so, I call on you to repent. Share this with God in prayer and ask God for help to reform.