**Principles Over Prejudice**

Matthew 7:1 “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. **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? **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. **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. (ESV)

When we come to this particular passage we always have to address certain problems that have arisen in the Church and culture surrounding these verses, particularly the first verse. This is one of the most famous passages in the Bible nowadays, but it is famous not for the powerful truth within it, but for the misinterpretation and misapplication of the truths Jesus is seeking to convey here. This passage is uplifted by almost all peoples of the world, which is a sure sign that there is something wrong with their interpretation of it, because the Bible is clear that those who are of the world are hostile to the Gospel. That leaves us with two options: Either they are not of the world and are actually believers, or what they believe this verse means is not what it actually means. I suggest the latter.

It’s important we be clear about this one thing: Although Jesus says not to judge here, it also tells us many other places in Scripture to judge. In John 7:24 the same Jesus that makes this statement in verse one also says, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul commands the Church at Corinth to pass judgement on a believer that is sleeping with his step-mother, and in verse 12 Paul literally says it is the job of believers to judge those inside the church body. So how do we reconcile these two statements with what Jesus says here in Matthew 7? (Not to mention the many other verses on judgement)

The easy way out for many is to say “Jesus didn’t say that. that was Paul, or Peter, or John.” But this is a terrible misunderstanding of the Word of God. ALL of Scripture is God’s Word. The words in black carry as much weight as the words in red because the same God spoke both. Jesus is described in Scripture as the Word of God. 1 Timothy 3:16 tells us that ALL Scripture is God-breathed. Jesus Himself spoke these things to believers like Paul, who then wrote them down to share with the churches. So we have another two options: Either God is a liar who contradicts Himself or both statements are true at the same time: “Judge not” and “make a right judgement”. The latter option is the right one.

There are many things we are told to do in the Christian life that we could not do without passing judgement. So, what exactly does Jesus mean when He says explicitly, “Do not judge”? For one, let us establish that certain judgement is a good thing. But there is a sort of bad judgement—a judgement that is self-centered and overly-critical. This is a sort of spirit within a person that seeks to always find faults in others—actually WANTS to find faults in others. It is one thing to notice faults in a person, but it is another thing to LOOK for faults.

There are people that take great pleasure in looking for all the problems they can find in others. These people are happy to hear of someone’s failure and excited to see someone look bad in the eyes of others. This spirit—this mentality—is the spirit of judgement. God has called us to judge things rightly. What does He mean by that? We are to judge things based on the principles God has laid down, not based on our own prejudices. Your own personal problem with a person will lead to bias and prejudice in judgement. But true judgement is done when we do not let our own preferences, opinions, or bias in the way, and instead pass judgement on a situation or person based on right and wrong—based on what God’s Word says about the situation or person at hand. Principles must guide judgements because prejudice will lead us astray

A person that judges by principles and by God’s Word will seeking to exercise mercy and compassion on the person being judged. A person that judges by the Word of God will have a heart to see the person doing wrong restored to fellowship with God and the Church in holiness. The real test of how a person passes judgement is if they are fiercely seeking punishment for the person or if they are seeking healing. Wrong judges desire punishment; right judges desire healing. Sometimes healing comes through punishment, but we shouldn’t be quick to deal out judgement. If we desire to punish it’s a sign our heart is not right.

Jesus carries it on to say that we will be judged in the same way we pass judgement on another. We set the standard of our own judgement from both God and others. How often do people that judge others get upset when they themselves are judged? We are exposing ourselves to the judgement of God when we judge others and their actions. When we severely criticize and judge others for their sins or failures but fail to address our own God will have us much mercy on us that we did on those we judged: very little. When we show others little mercy, God shows us little mercy.

And it is the mark of a hypocrite to show little mercy to others and much to themselves. That is why Jesus uses this analogy of the speck in a person’s eye and a log in your own. How silly it would be to try to get dust out of a friends eye when your own eye is lodged with something even bigger. That is Jesus’ point. That is why Jesus uses the analogy of the eye. When something is in our eye our vision is blocked—we can’t see clearly. And if we can’t see clearly we will be unable to help someone who also can’t see clearly. It is like the blind leading the blind. Sin blinds us. It keeps us from seeing clearly. Sometimes sin even keeps us from seeing other people’s faults clearly. We are so blinded by our own sin that we look down on them for theirs. Then when we try and correct them or punish them or judge them, we hurt them more because our own sin has gotten in the way. Our jealousy, pride, anger sometimes lead us to speak terribly or arrogantly towards someone who is sinning, while we don’t even realize that our desire to correct them is actually born out of our own sin.

So often we are quick to point out other’s fault and to judge them, but we won’t judge ourselves. We won’t examine our own heart first. That is God’s great desire. We would do a lot less judging if we looked at our own heart first. If we were truly honest people, we would judge ourselves more than others. When presented with an opportunity to judge or look down on a person for their sin or faults we would be humble and consider where our heart might be in the matter. The eye is the most sensitive part of the body. Removing something from the eye can be very painful. Removing things in our life that are blinding us is a hard process for us. Getting rid of sin and evil in our own lives is hard but necessary if we truly want to help others grow and be saved from sin.

*I have had more trouble with myself than with any other man. – Dwight L. Moody*

The whole point of it all is that we must be aware of our own faults and misgivings first. How often do we criticize others and yet we have serious faults of our own that we are overlooking?

This final verse is a little confusing for people. What does it mean to cast pearls before swine and what does it have to do with what Jesus said in the verses before? Swine represent pigs, which we all know are wild animals. Dogs in that day and age were not viewed as tame house pets but as wild animals. Here is the point: don’t give precious things to creatures that don’t see the value in them.

Pearls and holy things represent the truth of the gospel. There are people in this world that do not see the value in the gospel and when it is shared with them they mock, joke, laugh, and even get angry about it. Jesus is calling us to judge. Wow, so first He said we shouldn’t judge, but now He is saying we should judge people—we should consider their spiritual condition. See the judgement here is different. The kind of judgement that Jesus denounces is the kind that seeks fault in others and seeks to look down on them for it. The kind that is overly critical and hostile towards others for their sins. But we still have to make important judgements. We have to have discernment and be willing to see how people are different. We make a judgement when we decide not to give pearls and great jewelry to pigs. We have judged that they are not fit to be given such a gift. But a person—that is someone that is more likely to value it.

We are not to judge people—constantly looking for faults—but we are to make judgements. I believe Jesus made this statement following his teaching on judgement to remind us that not all judgement is sin—only a certain kind. We still have a responsibility to judge rightly based on God’s Word. We have to judge people and determine sometimes the best way to approach them with the gospel. We have to make decisions about how to help them best. It is a necessary part of our faith. To judge or not to judge—that is the question. And the answer is to judge yourself first—to check your own heart—and to make sure you are right with God first. Then, and only then can you begin to seek to help and provide healing for others because your motives will no longer be selfish. It’s all about motives