

STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

ABOUT JUDGING OTHERS!

Read Matthew 7:1-6; Luke 6:37-42.

Probably one of the most misquoted and misused verses in the New Testament is found in verse 1 of our passage:

"Judge not, that you be not judged." (7:1)

It is a hard saying. Can it mean what it seems to? So often I hear people chiding any negative statement with this verse. If we cannot make critical judgments, doesn't our ability to choose between good and evil disappear?

Jesus requires of his disciples several critical judgments in this chapter:

"First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (7:5). Both discerning the plank in your own eye and then discerning the speck in your brother's require critical judgment.

"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine" (7:6a). Jesus expects us to discern "dogs" and "pigs."

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits." (7:15-16). Jesus expects his followers to discern false prophets from true ones.

So, the command "Judge not" cannot prohibit all critical judgments.

Notice, too, that the context here is "brothers" (7:3, 5), fellow believers. Jesus is speaking about the kind of judgmental attitude that can spring up among religious people within the religious community. You have seen it: picky, picky, picky. No one is quite good enough to please them. Some men and women act as if they have the spiritual gift of criticism.

If you look even more carefully, you see that we are not prohibited from discerning sin or problems in our brother, or even seeking to correct them. But we must first examine ourselves to make sure nothing in us prevents us from seeing clearly. Then, and then only, says Jesus, you can "see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (7:5).

Jesus does not require us to suspend our critical faculties. But he is warning us not to be quick to criticize, since our judgmental attitude may reflect our own sins more than our brothers' sins. The Message translation puts v1 like this:

"Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults -- unless, of course, you want the same treatment." (v1 MSG)

So, while this does not prohibit examining the lives of others, it certainly prohibits doing it in the spirit it is often done. An example of unjust judgment was the disciples' condemnation of the woman who came to anoint the feet of Jesus with oil (Matthew 26:6-13). They thought she was wasting something; Jesus said she had done a good work that would always be remembered. They had a rash, harsh, unjust judgment.

- We break this command when we think the worst of others.
- We break this command when we only speak to others of their faults.

- We break this command when we judge an entire life only by its worst moments.
- We break this command when we judge the hidden motives of others.
- We break this command when we judge others without considering ourselves in their same circumstances.
- We break this command when we judge others without being mindful that we ourselves will be judged.

Healing & Restoring...

Wouldn't it be refreshing to be part of a church where brothers and sisters would encourage one another to love and good works, and be very gentle with one another's weaknesses? Yes, our obligation as brothers and sisters is to help one another escape from sin, but we need to carry out this duty very carefully and lovingly, like fine eye surgery:

"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any sin, you who are spiritual [that is, you who are responsive to the guidance of the Spirit] are to restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness [not with a sense of superiority or self-righteousness], keeping a watchful eye on yourself, so that you are not tempted as well. Carry one another's burdens and in this way, you will fulfil the requirements of the law of Christ [that is, the law of Christian love]." (Galatians 6:1-2 AMP)

The Measure You Use

Here Jesus talks about kinds of measures. I think of sets of measuring cups and measuring spoons in our modern-day kitchens. There are various sizes. In this passage there is no doubt that God is the one who will measure out the blessing to you in accordance with the measure with which you give.

If we measure out criticism to our brothers, then God will measure out criticism to us on Judgment Day. If we measure out blessing and encouragement, then that will be measured out to us. If we use a tiny measuring cup, we will receive a tiny recompense. But if we heap on the criticism, then we can expect a heaped-up judgment on ourselves.

Specks & Planks

An example of looking for a speck in the eye of another while ignoring the plank in one's own is when the religious leaders brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus. She had certainly sinned; but their sin was much worse, and Jesus exposed it as such with the statement, He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first (John 8:7).

Jesus calls those who are quick to correct others without correcting themselves "hypocrites," and enjoins them to take the plank out of their own eye first. Before criticizing someone else we need to humble ourselves before God and repent of our own sins. Then in humility we can serve others in genuine love, rather than genuine pride. Notice, in Matthew 7:5, after they remove the plank from their own eye, then they can see clearly to help their brother. They probably also have a good idea of how painful this surgery is and will be extremely gentle and understanding.

Our hypocrisy in these matters is almost always more evident to others than to ourselves. We may find a way to ignore the plank in our own eye, but others notice it immediately. A good example of this kind of hypocrisy was David's reaction to Nathan's story about a man who unjustly stole and killed another man's lamb. David quickly condemned the man, but was blind to his own sin, which was much greater (2 Samuel 12).

Pigs and Dogs

One of the keys is to understand the view of dogs and pigs in Hebrew culture. Pigs, of course, were considered unclean animals; Jews were forbidden to eat pork of any kind. Only Gentiles raised pigs (Matthew 8:30-34).

We think of a dog as "man's best friend," but that was by no means the view of the period we are studying. Rather they were scavengers around the towns and cities. They might eat the decaying flesh of carcasses in the wild, which would have deeply offended the Jews' understanding of holiness and ritual cleanness. Dogs are looked down on in verses like Proverbs 26:11 and Matthew 15:26-27. The Jews also used the word "dogs" to refer to Gentile outsiders (compare Philippians 3:2 and Revelation 22:15).

Can you imagine giving holy food from the temple to an unclean dog/scavenger? Of course not! Pearls were extremely precious. To throw them into the pig pen would be to not only lose them in the slime, but also to anger the pig, who might come after you for throwing him inedible food.

The metaphor seems to be teaching against giving what is considered just or holy to those who do not appreciate it.

Forgiving and Giving (Luke 6:37-38)

We have dealt with the judging section. Now,

"Forgive (apoluō), and ye shall be forgiven (apoluō passive);

Give (didōmi), and it shall be given unto you (didōmi passive)...."

Notice the Hebrew parallelism here? The first two clauses are synonymous parallelism; they say essentially the same thing. The second two clauses are antithetic parallelism; they state the other side of judging, that is, forgiving and giving. The Greek words used are fairly common:

apoluō – "set free, release, pardon."

didōmi – "give, grant, bestow, impart."¹⁸⁰

The first pair of negative commands tells us disciples not to be judgmental, condemnatory, blaming, fault-finding, critical people. The second pair of positive commands tells us to be forgiving, generous, merciful, gracious, and tender-hearted people.

The positive traits of giving and forgiving are definitely spiritual. Jesus has enrolled his disciples in a school of the Spirit designed to teach us love for enemies, forgiveness towards those who hurt us, and generosity rather than selfishness and self-protection. Instead of judging and condemning our enemies, we are to forgive and give to them. And if this is the way we are to treat our enemies, how much more our acquaintances and friends. This is to be an attitude lifestyle for us. And if it does not come naturally, we can call on Jesus to retrain us for his service.

Choosing Your Measuring Cup (Luke 6:38b)

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure (metron), pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure (metreō) you use, it will be measured (antimetreo passive) to you." (6:38)

Jesus goes on to talk about the degree of generosity by discussing measures. The key Greek words here are

metron -- "'measure,' an instrument for measuring."

metreō -- "measure, give out, deal out, apportion."

antimetreō -- "measure in return."

What Jesus is saying is that you'll get back what you give out, whether judgment or forgiveness. And you will receive it in the proportion that you dispense it. If you dispense forgiveness with a teaspoon, you will receive back teaspoon portions yourself. If you dispense forgiveness by the bushel basket, you will be overflowing with it.

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

This a form of the law or principle of sowing and reaping taught elsewhere in the New Testament.

"But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." (Galatians 6:7-8)

The law applies in the natural world -- sow a few seeds, reap a small harvest -- and in the spiritual world - - sow to the sinful nature, reap destruction, sow to the Spirit and reap eternal life. It applies with judgmentalness and forgiveness. It also applies with giving and receiving. We are taught to be generous.

Have you ever wondered why you struggle at the upper edge of poverty? It may have to do with your stinginess about giving financially towards God. If it is true -- and I find every reason to believe it is, based on 2 Corinthians 9:6 and Luke 6:38 -- that God gives to us in relation to how we give to Him, then stinginess will be rewarded with little financial blessing, and generosity will be rewarded with great financial blessing.

... continued next week...

