

Overcoming a Spirit of Judgment (Matt 7.1-6)

I. REVIEW: PURSUING THE VALUES OF GOD'S KINGDOM

- A. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is the most expansive teaching of Jesus on the role of a believer in cooperating with God's grace. To pursue a life built around obedience to the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is to build a life that has sure and sturdy foundations that will not be shaken in times of trial and testing (Matt 7.24-27).
- B. Jesus invites his followers to intentionally order our lives around these teachings. It is not enough to hear the words of Jesus and accept them, we are commanded to **obey** them through intentionally pursuing cooperation with God's grace in response to his teaching.
- C. The Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus' statement on the value-system of the kingdom of heaven. The eight beatitudes operate as invitations into holding and embodying the things that are truly great in God's economy and kingdom.
- D. Another way to think about these values is related to the ideas of satisfaction and fulfillment (what is the "good life"). Every society in human history has presented a picture of what it believes will provide true and lasting satisfaction (wholeness, happiness, joy, etc.) to people. Humans are hard-wired to orient our lives around what we believe will provide us the most true and lasting fulfillment. Whatever we picture in our minds as providing us ultimate happiness (money, status, freedom, etc.) will be the things we orient our actions around attaining.
- E. After outlining the values of his kingdom, Jesus outlines the way we are to pursue cultivating these values in our lives. He does so by highlighting six sins that we are to **actively resist** (anger, lust, divorce, false oaths, retaliation, and withholding love) and several means of grace that his disciples are to **actively pursue** (giving, prayer, forgiving, fasting, and trusting) in partnership with his grace.
- F. Jesus then exhorts his disciples to **seek first** the kingdom of God and his righteousness. To seek first his kingdom is to set our hearts to pursue the things that are valuable to him and to order our lives in accordance with his ways.

II. NAVIGATING RELATIONSHIPS

- A. Jesus understands that seeking to walk out wholehearted obedience to his commandments and his teachings will create many new relational dynamics in the lives of his followers.
- B. The following section outlines two tensions that arise as Christians seek to embrace a life that intentionally pursues the values of God's kingdom in its fullness.
 - 1. The temptation toward a **spirit of judgment** (7.1-5). As we pursue God's ways, we are tempted to operate in a critical spirit (spirit of judgment) toward others.
 - 2. The potential of **being judged by others** (7.6). As we pursue God's ways, Jesus acknowledges the real potential of others who will judge us as we pursue the things close to God's heart.
- C. In each of these realities, Jesus gives a simple instruction of *how* to navigate these relationships in order to carry our hearts in obedience to him.
- D. One of the most difficult realities of sustaining a faithful, wholehearted pursuit of Jesus through our lives is navigating difficult relational dynamics that arise in the face of such a pursuit. Jesus wants us to be aware of this potential "on the front end" so that we seek to respond in accordance with his ways.

III. DO NOT JUDGE (MATT 7.1)

¹Judge not, that you be not judged. (Matt 7.1)

- A. This section begins with one of the most well-known verses in the whole of the Scripture. Although it is well known and often quick to be quoted, it is one of most highly misunderstood and misapplied verses in the Scripture.
- B. Many times, in our contemporary understanding, this verse is used to promote a false sense that Christians are never to evaluate others in any manner whatsoever. The common sentiment of “no judgment” is pervasive throughout our world. In a highly individualistic world, this commandment becomes the “proof text” for justifying life decisions that cannot be called into question by anyone else.
- C. Yet, in this verse, Jesus is not attempting to give a commandment for his disciples to never practice evaluation or discernment as it pertains to what is right and wrong in the world (even in relation to others). Throughout the Scripture we are given specific commands to evaluate (i.e., to judge) other individuals, behaviors, and teachings in accordance with God’s word.
 1. Later in this context Jesus commands his disciples to practice judgment in not giving things that are holy to the “dogs” and “pigs”.

⁶Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs (Matt 7.6)
 2. He also commands them to evaluate (i.e., watch out for) false teachers and not follow in their ways.

¹⁵Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them (judgment) by their fruits. (Matt 7.15-16)
 3. Paul exhorts Christians to flee from immorality and not share fellowship with believers who continue to practice wickedness without repentance.

¹¹But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler — not to even eat with such a one. ¹²For what have I to do with judging outsiders Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? (1 Cor 5.11-12)
- D. Jesus’ command to not judge must therefore be shaped by the rest of the context of this passage in order for us to rightly understand what he is teaching.
- E. Jesus is not commanding his disciples to never practice discernment, evaluation, or assessing as it relates to the type of person they long to be (or what is right and wrong, what behaviors should or should not be done, etc.). Rather, Jesus is calling his disciples to be critical of their own propensity for operating towards others in a distorted critical spirit.
- F. This is demonstrated by Jesus statements related to the *measure* of judgment (7.2) and the example of the tendency towards *hypocrisy* in judgment (7.3-4).

IV. OUR PROPENSITIES IN JUDGMENT (7.2-5)

²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or 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? (Matt 7.2-4)

- A. Jesus explains his commandment to not judge by highlighting two sinful propensities that we all have in how we make evaluations and exercise discernment. Jesus understands the destructive nature of these propensities and desires that his followers would operate in a different spirit as it relates to walking in their relationships.

- B. The first propensity in our hearts related to judgment is *to evaluate others with a different measure (standard) than we desire to be evaluated with.*
1. Jesus declares a principle of natural wisdom — the moment we make an evaluation we set up a standard by which we ourselves can be evaluated.
 2. Many of us walk through our lives unaware of the disparity in how we assess others and assess ourselves. By nature, we are often more exacting with others and more justifying (gracious) with ourselves.
 3. Jesus wants us to see that we will be judged with the same measuring stick that we judge others.
- C. The second propensity in our hearts is closely tied to the first. Jesus highlights here our propensity to *fixate on small areas of immaturity and shortcoming* — often times while we are unaware of major problems in our own hearts.
1. Jesus teachings that we are often quick to notice the speck in our brother’s eye. In other words, we are quick focus on small aspects that cloud their sight and ability to act accordingly. It is often our propensity to relate to others based on aspects of their character that are immature or underdeveloped. We can be prone to distort or magnify these and make them the singular basis of how we interpret the motives of others.
 2. It is important here to note that Jesus is not talking about the sin of our brother. Jesus is not calling for his people to be tolerant of sin, or to sweep it under the rug. Sin must be dealt with in a spirit of love and truth — following the *process* that is given by Jesus (going to our brother, etc.; cf. Matt 18.15-20).
 3. Jesus invites us to be aware that often times we are assessing others’ shortcomings without first taking time and effort to understand our own, larger areas in our lives that distort our ability to see and act in accordance with God’s desires. These issues often include selfishness, pride, and compromises that others may not be aware of — but still distort our ability to “see” (evaluate) correctly.
- D. Because of this, Jesus commands his disciples to *first* address the log in their own eye by his grace and then come to their brother related to the speck. This further establishes that Jesus is not calling his disciples to never practice discernment, assessment, or evaluation in relationship with others. Rather, we are called to operate in a right *spirit*, according to the right *process*, in the right *order*.
1. The right *spirit* speaks of walking with a spirit of gentleness, humility, and patience with regard to our brother (Prov 15.1; Gal 6.1; Jas 1.19).
 2. The right *process* includes seeking to gain all the information necessary to make a right evaluation (Prov 18.17) and going to our brother privately (Matt 18.15).
 3. The right *order* seeks to ask God to bring to light the areas in my own life that are clouding my ability to evaluate rightly *before* I seek to bring correction to my brother. Understanding my own great need for (and reception of) mercy disposes me more toward mercy with my brother (Matt 18.21-35).

V. PRACTICING DISCERNMENT WITH HOLY THINGS (MATT 7.6)

⁶Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. (Matt 7.6)

- A. Jesus warns his disciples to be cautious and discerning about dispensing holy things (pearls) to those who are unreceptive. There is a time that disciples are called to “move on” from unreceptive people (Matt 10.14-15).
- B. Jesus states that there are people who will turn and trample on the truths of God and ultimately turn on the disciples — attacking them (both in persecution and in reviling).

VI. OVERCOMING A SPIRIT OF JUDGMENT

- A. This passage highlights the reality that even within the community of Jesus there is a temptation toward a critical spirit, or a spirit of judgment. The presence of this among a community operates like a spiritual cancer and has the power to destroy it from within.
- B. We must be on guard to watch for a spirit of judgment at work among us. This speaks of a pervasive judgment of someone's motives or character that is not particularly situational in nature (i.e., not a sin) that we allow to cloud the whole of our interpretation related to another.
- C. This type of judgment is related to what could be called a spirit of accusation — and often deals with a brother or sister on the basis of *one aspect of their character*. With this, we tend to magnify or heighten shortcomings, while not assessing (or acknowledging) the grace of God in their lives.

D. Be careful what you listen to

- 1. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus uses the same phrase concerning the measure (standard) we use being used toward us in relation to what we *listen to*.

²⁴Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. (Mark 4.24)

- 2. What Jesus means here is that our standards of evaluation are shaped by what we give heed to. As we listen to other's evaluations, our own ways of making sense (meaning) in the world are shaped and formed. Jesus wants us to be on guard about what *kinds* of things we let shape our evaluations.
- 3. We must be discerning in what we allow to shape the tone and the content of our judgments.

E. Embracing God's evaluation

- 1. One of the most powerful ways we combat a spirit of judgment in our dealings with others is to embrace God's evaluation — both of ourselves and of others.
- 2. We become aware of God's evaluation through time in his word, time in the place of prayer, and asking him for his heart for others. Spend specific time asking God about how he sees other people in your life.
- 3. We all desire that people would deal with us on the basis of love and grace (this is the measure we long for). Because of this, we must actively labor to be filled with the power of the Spirit to deal with others in accordance with this measure.
- 4. God's evaluation system is drastically different than man's, and we must labor to understand his evaluation (narrative of grace) for others in our lives.

⁵because David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite. (1 Kings 15.5)

¹⁹Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; ²⁰yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God (Rom 4.19-20)

- 5. One of the primary ways that God has designed for his people to be built up and edified is through his people speaking his heart over them. This is the spirit of prophecy.

³the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation... ⁵the one who prophesies builds up the church. (1 Cor 14.3, 5)