

Session 7

JUDGMENT AND DISCERNMENT

Matthew 7:1-6

Memory Verse

“Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged. ² For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use.

– MATTHEW 7:1-2, CSB




Judgment and Discernment


THEOLOGICAL THEME: How should Christians confront other Christians about sin in their lives? This is an area of sanctification that Christians often neglect because of the potential for conflict.

We might take any number of things with us to make camping a better, more enjoyable experience. A tent is a good starting point. Food is usually a good idea. Fishing poles could come in handy. But one thing is absolutely indispensable: a campfire. The cardinal sin of camping is to let the fire burn out. The first person up in the morning has one job: get the fire going again. Usually, this isn't necessary to start back from scratch. There are almost always embers raked up in the wood ashes. All it takes is a little bit of stirring and a bit more fuel to get the fire going strong again.

The early morning campfire provides a helpful illustration of the Christian's battle against sin. We must remember that although the Christian is no longer a slave to sin, he or she continues to remain under the influence of sin. The Christian must continue to fight against the old nature, old desires, and old habits of disobedience. Like the early morning remnants of a campfire, a Christian still has the embers of sin raked up in the ashes of the old nature. Christians must be diligent to make sure to keep these embers smothered to block access to a fresh stirring and fuel to restart the fire.

In our passage today, we will consider one of the ways a Christian's old wicked ways can flame up into sin: hypocrisy. The overarching theme of Jesus' teaching in this passage was the war between pride and humility in the heart of a Christian.

 How much do you know about camping? What are the essential elements of camping?


 What are the requirements for a good campsite? Why did you select these things?

Session Summary

In this passage, Jesus condemned judging that isn't first self-applied. He advocated for living that matches believing. In Christ, we have a new identity, and that identity should lead to new living. Christians are people who have been transformed on the inside and are now being reformed on the outside. The medicine of the gospel begins its work on the human heart and always works its way out to behavior. The old, raked-up sin nature, however, bursts into flame if we aren't careful. One particularly dangerous area is when Christians use judgment and discernment in regard to the sin of their fellow Christians. In this passage Jesus exhorted His followers to first be grieved for their own sin (Matt. 5:3) before pointing out the sin of others. Christians are to judge others only from a position of humility, repentance, and mercy.

1. A Two-Way Street (Matt. 7:1-4)

This teaching of Jesus rests between a warning against idolatry (6:25-34) and an assurance of God's sovereign working, through prayer, on behalf of His children (7:7-11). One thing is clear, the points that Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount are central to the Christian life. These are not ancillary issues that a Christian may encounter from time to time. Jesus addressed the battles that Christians begin to fight the moment their eyes open in the morning.

 According to Jesus, what happens when we apply a standard of judgment to someone else?

Jesus warned that “you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use.” Many people read verse 7:1 and automatically conclude that Christians should never evaluate the life of another Christian.

Yet, this is not what Jesus taught here. If all we had to go off of was Matthew 7:1, then one may reasonably conclude that any sort of judgment is off-limits, but the overarching teaching of Scripture says something different, including Matthew 7:2-6. So, we need to put aside the notion that Christians ought not ever pass judgment on one another. Christians are, in fact, to be subject to one another (Eph. 5:21), bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), speak truth to one another (Eph. 4:25), encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11), and teach one another (Col. 3:16). All of those activities require judgment and discernment. The New Testament is unambiguous about the fact that Christians are to judge and use discernment (1 Cor. 5:12; John 7:24; Phil. 1:9).

? If this wasn't a prohibition on judgment, then what was Jesus' intended meaning in this passage?

The term "judgment" carries some very negative connotations in our culture. As a result, the word itself has become almost exclusively associated with pious, holier-than-thou, hypocritical condemnation. Much judgment is passed in this way. However, discerning judgment in and of itself isn't bad and can actually be a good and helpful thing. The problem comes when judgment is misused and abused, when it is passed from a position of superiority and condemnation.

This passage isn't a prohibition of judging, rather it is a prohibition on condemning judgment. James described this kind of judgment: "Don't criticize one another, brothers and sisters. Anyone who defames or judges a fellow believer defames and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge" (Jas. 4:11). Paul phrased it this way: "Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4).

? Why should we avoid condemning judgment against our brothers and sisters?

Christians should not judge unto condemnation for three reasons. First, judging unto condemnation is God's prerogative, not human's. No person has the ability to know the heart of another fully or the right to condemn him or her. Secondly, if another person is a brother or sister in Christ, depending upon the finished work of Christ on the cross as their hope of salvation, then they aren't condemned. Finally, Christians dare not judge a brother or sister unto condemnation because they themselves cannot stand under their own criteria. The Bible is clear that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and that none are righteous, not even one (Rom. 3). A Christian condemning another Christian is a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black.

? Application: When you evaluate the life of another Christian, do you do so with the finished work of Christ on the cross in mind? When you see the sin of another Christian do you desire for the Lord to work in their lives to bring them to repentance, or do you have feelings of superiority and disdain toward them? Do you hold yourself to this same standard? Why or why not?

2. How Not to Be a Hypocrite (Matt. 7:5)

Christians must judge, evaluate, and discern. This includes judging and evaluating the lives of other believers. If Christians didn't do this, then they wouldn't know how to love one another, encourage one another, or teach one another. However, this judgment and evaluation must be done with gospel-centered discernment.

? What did Jesus mean in teaching His followers to "take the beam of wood out" of their own eyes?

Christians should take stock of their own situation in order to gain a proper perspective on the sin of another. This is why Jesus told His followers, “First take the beam of wood out of your eye.” All Christians are in the same boat. Every single person is guilty, condemned, spiritually dead, and under the wrath of God. For every Christian, the only means of right standing before God is through the death of the sinless Savior, Jesus. A self-righteous reputation crumbles to pieces when exposed by the blaring truth that proceeds from Golgotha’s hill. Those who judge with gospel-centered discernment do so with humility, repentance, and mercy.

? Read Matthew 18:21-35. How does this parable relate to the principle of assessing one another according to the gospel? How does a right understanding of the gospel inevitably lead us to show mercy toward others?

The parable of the unmerciful servant is a shocking contrast between merciful discernment and condemning judgment. The message was clear, those who have been shown mercy ought to show mercy. The opposite took place in the parable, and that is what is so shocking about it. It should be equally as shocking when a born-again believer condemningly judges his brother.

Christians have been shown great mercy by God the Father. Ephesians 2:4-5 sums it up like this, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!”

Richard Sibbes wrote, “We have this for a fountain of truth, that there is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.”¹ This truth causes our hearts to leap with joy (another Godward affection), but it doesn’t end there: Godward affection always leads to godly living. If we have truly experienced the mercy of God, then we will, however imperfectly, show mercy to others.

? Application: How does the gospel change the way you view the sin of others? How are you more inclined to be merciful and humble with a brother’s or sister’s sin when you are keenly aware of your own need for forgiveness?

The end goal of the process Jesus outlined in these verses is getting ourselves to a place where we can judge others, because loving correction is necessary in the Christian life. One of the great gifts of Christian community is the ability to grow through the correction of others. Wherever you stand today in relations to Jesus' command, there is still room to grow. When we embrace His commands in these verses we grow in our closeness to Him and to other believers.

3. Dealing with Dogs and Hogs (Matt. 7:6)

In verses 1-5, Jesus prohibited Christians from judging other Christians unto condemnation as though they were God and without sin. Further, He taught that Christians should evaluate and judge the sin of others with a humble, gospel-centered posture that is characterized by humility and mercy. When Christians have this perspective, then they can give good counsel and helpful reproof to their brothers and sisters. Gospel-soaked confrontation of sin is a valuable thing, a pearl. A Christian who has taken stock of his own situation and lovingly and humbly confronts sin in the life of a fellow believer reproves wisely (Prov. 25:12) and is like a tree of life. (Prov. 3:18).

 What did Jesus prohibit in verse 6? What did He mean by dogs and hogs?

Jesus said, “Don’t give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs.” Obviously, it is a great waste of a precious thing to give it to someone who shows no appreciation for it, or, worse yet, despises it.

When we hear the word “dogs” we think of the tame, lovable, domesticated variety. However, in 1st-century Israel, dogs were wild, savage, untamed scavengers. Pigs were considered unclean. Both of these animals represent something that is detestable. On the other hand, the pearls we have to give—the grace, wisdom, and truth of the gospel—are of immeasurable value and worth. Jesus encouraged His listeners to not give what is precious to them to people who repeatedly ignore it, belittle it, or fail to understand it. The natural disposition of every human heart is to reject God’s truth.

The point of this verse is that Christians who have the precious gift of humble confrontation of sin to offer ought not to give it to those who show contempt for it. Jesus called Christians to show discernment and rightly judge the character of another. If a person is unwilling to receive with thanksgiving something as valuable and precious as humble, gospel-centered counsel, then it should be kept for a more appropriate audience.

Jesus provided a rule to any who would seek to obey verse 5. A Christian's commitment to speak the truth about sin to another must be guided by discernment and discretion. Christians should not go about giving counsel, rebuke, or comfort to one who is stiff-necked and scornful and will not benefit, but will be exasperated and enraged by it. If you throw a pearl to a pig, he will resent it just as if you had thrown a common stone at him.



Application: How might you seek discernment from the Holy Spirit when seeking to share the gospel with others?

Conclusion

In light of the heavy themes of the Law and the pursuit righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount, it would be easy for Jesus' followers to become confident in their relationship with Him and critical of others. To guard against this, Jesus gave a strong warning in regard to judging others. When we take it upon ourselves to make critical and disparaging judgments about the failures of other Christians, we are not living as the kingdom people Jesus calls us to be. This type of judging is ultimately a form of idolatry, as we put ourselves in the place of God. Jesus warned that the measure we use in evaluating others' actions is exactly the same measure we should expect to be measured by. We must always be cautious before we criticize others.

It is a misrepresentation of Jesus' teaching to say that Christians should not judge. That isn't true. Christians must judge, but they must do so rightly. Christians should not sit in the seat of judgment over other Christians as though they were God and without sin. Rather they should humbly discern, evaluate, and judge through the lens of the gospel and confront sin with humility and mercy.

? Where have you been guilty of recognizing the sin of others without recognizing your own sin? How might you seek to be more self-aware of your sin?

? How can you guard against judging unto condemnation and make sure that you practice gospel-soaked discernment with others?

? How might living charitably toward one another give Christians an opportunity to share with those who do not yet follow Christ?

CHRIST CONNECTION: The gospel reminds Christians of their own desperate need of forgiveness and wretchedness before the Father, which will cause them to first examine their own hearts and then confront sin in their brother or sister with a heavy dose of humility and grace.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Dealing with sin by the power of the gospel is a potent testimony to an unbelieving world and is an effective tool in the hand of God to open the hearts of unbelievers to the gospel of Jesus Christ.



FOR NEXT WEEK

Going Against the Flow

Main Passages

- Matthew 7:7-14

Session Outline

1. You Must Ask
2. You Will Be Answered
3. Pray Also for Them

Memorize

“Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged. ² For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use.

- Matthew 7:1-2, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - 1 Peter 2:9
- Tuesday - Colossians 3:1
- Wednesday - 1 Peter 5:8
- Thursday - Colossians 3:10
- Friday - 1 Corinthians 6:11
- Saturday - John 17:15-18

References

¹Sibbes, Richard. *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax*, 1630. Menston: Scolar Press, 1973.