

The Judgement Question

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[0 : 00] as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law. Amen. So we're thinking about this judgment question that we find in the first five verses of chapter 7. It comes towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount. What does the question deal with? Maybe it isn't as immediately clear as we might think. Jesus is addressing the topic, how should a person behave, a Christian behave towards a fellow Christian who does wrong? You see a Christian do wrong, how should I judge?

How should I act? Before we get to the question, it's interesting to see that Jesus frames it within sort of the wider context of what he's been teaching. So in chapter 6, he's been thinking about how does God relate to us? And the emphasis has been on the truth that God relates to His people as a father to His children. So you see that there in verse 4 of chapter 6 about the father rewarding giving that's done secretly with a good heart. In verse 9, the Lord's prayer, teaching His people to pray our father in heaven. Or the whole section on worry and anxiety, encouraging the people of God to know that God's a father who sees us as valuable and who cares for us. So chapter 6, the emphasis is very much on God as father. But then there's a shift in chapter 7 to remind us that God is God is judge. All those small teaching sections all have that idea of judging and discerning. So there's the wide and there was the narrow path, the one that leads to life and one that leads to destruction. There was the good and the bad fruit. There was the true and the false disciples. All of it reminding us that God is our father and He's also our judge. And that should impact how we relate to one another. And it should impact how we think about ourselves.

You have to think about God both as our judge, as our father. We should pursue personal holiness. We should deal with our own sin. But we should also then, when we think about other people, we should be merciful and gentle. Because God is merciful, gentle, and gracious with us.

[2 : 32] That should affect how we deal with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The judgment question, of course, is a wonderful kind of comedy image, isn't it? The idea of the person walking around with a great big plank in their eye, presuming that they can deal with the tiny speck in the eye of another. He uses it to convey a serious point. I brought with me Teddy's favorite dog toy, very handy.

But you can imagine, can't you, if you went to the eye doctor, I've got my glasses on. Imagine you go to the eye doctor, doctor, there's something in my eye. I can't see because I've not got my glasses.

But we lack the clarity to deal with the problem. Jesus' question functions like an eye test for us. How is our vision of ourself, of our God, and of other people? Do I have a clear vision of God's holiness and of His gracious love towards me and towards all of His children?

Do I have a clear vision of my own sin, of my very great need of mercy and grace? Because we need to have that vision if we are to do what Jesus wants us to do, because it's really interesting that Jesus actually does want us to help one another. He does want us to help one another to grow in holiness, to live out obedience. He does want us to be involved in the lives of one another, but there's wrong ways to go about that, and there's a right way to go about that.

So we're going to think about the two wrong attitudes that Jesus points out, the one right attitude, and as we do that to recover the sense that we always ought to have of the need of the gospel. So let's go back. Verse 1, do not judge, or you too will be judged.

[4 : 34] So there's the issue. What does Jesus mean, and what does Jesus not mean? Because Jesus here is not saying to us, I am asking you to switch off your evaluating, discerning capabilities.

We see that even in verse 6. You know when He says in verse 6, do not give dogs what is sacred, do not throw your pearls to pigs? He's inviting us to discern, to evaluate, to pass judgment.

There in the sense of sharing the gospel, the implication is if somebody is stubbornly hostile, resisting the gospel, there's a wisdom that says this is not the right time and it's time to move on. So He's not saying we should never evaluate or discern or judge. And Jesus is not saying to Christians, you should never say another person, another Christian is wrong. That we are never invited to correct someone. We could go to Matthew chapter 18 and verse 15, and we hear Jesus really clearly on this. We get some principles about church discipline. But just to hear verse 15, Jesus says, if your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault. So there is a judgment that is to happen. Even there, there's a principle just between the two of you. So He's not saying we should never say anything and anyone is wrong. So we shouldn't just turn a blind eye to wrongdoing.

We shouldn't fail to discern the difference between good and evil. So what is Jesus saying no to when He says, do not judge? I would suggest He's saying no to a way of judging that ignores our relationship with God. That fails to remember that we always stand among those who are the judged.

[6 : 31] You know, if we have that tendency to always want to sit in the courtroom on the bench, to put on the wig, to have the hammer, and to stand above others, He says, we'll find ourselves in the dock.

We need to remember our place. And we need to remember that we are those who have received a Father's mercy. And so we are to be generous towards others as God has been generous towards us. So in this question about judging others and how to deal with another's behavior, we need to begin with understanding and appreciating how God relates to us.

Not judging and condemning us, though we sin greatly, but showing grace and mercy. So the question continues, how should we behave towards a Christian who we see doing wrong?

And there's two wrong attitudes in here that Jesus identifies. The first is this, we are not to be a harsh judge. Verses 1 and 2. Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Are you a glass half full or a glass half empty kind of a person? Somebody asked you that, I guess most of us, we know what that means. Are we naturally, temperamentally positive or negative as people? Do we tend to be optimistic or pessimistic? That colors how we see life.

You know, we talk about people seeing life through rose-tinted spectacles, always able to look on the bright side, while perhaps others see different shades of black. What about when we look at a fellow Christian? Especially when we see them fall into sin and we see them do wrong. What is our automatic knee-jerk reaction? And this is where Jesus says we need to remember our relationship with our God first. Remember God is the ultimate judge. Remember God is Father. And so there is a characteristic that is to be avoided, that harsh judgmentalism. We are to avoid harsh fault-finding. It can be all too easy to turn spotting sin into a hobby and a pastime, into an Olympic sport. We can be really adept at seeing the problems in others. We are to avoid hunting out error. Again, it's really easy to function like a spiritual bloodhound. We are to avoid assuming the worst in others.

[9 : 39] And we're always looking around for it. We are to avoid assuming the worst in others. Again, it can be easy for us to apply a double standard. When I sin, I can go really easy on myself. Well, it's because I was under pressure. I was caught off guard. That's the exception, but it's certainly not the rule when it comes to how I obey. But when I see someone else sin, how could you? You've got some major issues to deal with. We can easily apply a double standard.

Jesus says we are to avoid a lack of generosity. Now, that kind of mindset that would always keep someone on probation, that mentality would say one strike and you're out. A desire in our attitudes to apply strict justice without mercy. Maybe it can be a challenge for us as if we're mature believers. We've reached a certain level of Christian maturity. It can sometimes be hard to be patient with those who are new in the faith. You should know better. We expect more. And we can forget the struggles of our own past and indeed ignore the sins of our present. Jesus doesn't want us to act as harsh judges within the family of God. Two questions to ask ourselves. Actually, one of them is in the text a bit later on. How would I like other people to judge me, to treat me when I sin, when I fail? Remember Jesus' words in verse 12, in everything do to others what you would have them do to you. Apply that principle the other way. And the second question, how does God judge me? How does God treat me when I sin? We need to understand that we are receiving mercy and forgiveness and grace from our God and Father day upon day upon day. That we would let that change how we view others. That we would let that change how we judge others. So, we are not to be harsh judges.

And secondly, we are not to be hypocrites. It's there in verses 3 to 5. It's what the comedy image exposes. How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out your eye, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

There's a certain type of behavior that wants to deal with the minor issue that we see in someone else while ignoring the major issue going on in our own hearts and lives. Presuming ourselves capable to judge and correct when actually we show ourselves blind to our own faults. And Jesus wants to expose that wrong heart attitude of hypocrisy. Like an actor in a play, wearing a mask, playing a different part.

[12 : 57] The two-faced person, the say one thing, do another person. Don't be a hypocrite, Jesus says. Let's take an eye test for a moment or two to discover, is there something of the hypocrite in you and in me? What are some of the symptoms that we would expect to find?

I think the first would be connected to sensitivity. It's all too easy to be hypersensitive, super sensitive to the sin that we see in others, while all at the same time being desensitized to our own sin, to our own sin, to the same sin in our own life. That ability to pick up your faults with 4K, HD clarity. But when it comes to addressing my own sin, my vision gets very fuzzy, and everything seems so unimportant. So we'd expect to see an issue with sensitivity.

We'd also expect to discover some short-sightedness. To stand above others, to presume that we are in a position where we can judge someone else morally, to take that consistent standpoint, means we need to start acting in a certain way. We need to pretend that we are consistently above others, which leads then to hiding our sin, hiding our guilt from others and from ourselves.

If we are always going to put ourselves in the position to judge others, then we cannot dare to show anyone our own sin, and we cannot even deal with our own sin. And give that enough time, we will become so short-sighted that we will actually believe the lie, that we are somehow on a higher moral plane than others. We can become puffed up with pride, have a heart that is hard to personal sin, and all the while presuming, I have the authority and the clarity to judge you.

I took along a dog toy. I also took along a pair of binoculars. Boys and girls, we know how to use binoculars. Here's a big fat lens, and then there's a little lens. You look through the little lens, and everything gets magnified. A hypocrite will do that when it comes to other people's sin, magnifying other people's sins and faults.

[15 : 45] But do you know what happens when you turn binoculars the other way around? You look through the big fat lens, everything becomes tiny. Oh, that's quite funny. Everything becomes really tiny. And that's the... A hypocrite will take that view of themselves and their own sin.

So my sin seems tiny, but your sin seems enormous. And it's hypocrisy. And Jesus says there's no room for it. Here's another symptom that we might expect to find if there's hypocrisy in our hearts. A short fuse and a short temper.

A strong reaction to condemn the sin that we see in others. But when we do it ourselves, we don't find ourselves batting an eyelid at all.

One place where we see this in the Bible is with King David. After King David has been guilty of adultery with Bathsheba, and after he has arranged to have Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed, God sends Nathan, Nathan the prophet. And Nathan tells a story. There was two men. They were neighbors.

There was a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had lots of things. The poor man had just this one little lamb. One day, the rich man had a visitor. The visitor needs fed. So the rich man came and took the poor man's lamb and killed it and served it up for dinner. And David's response, that man deserves to die.

[17 : 21] It's a relatively small sin to steal a sheep. It's a huge sin to steal a man's wife and then have the man killed. He was furious at the sheep stealer, but at that stage, he hadn't been bothered, it seems, by his own sin. But at that point, conviction came. Maybe we've noticed something of this.

We can be really bothered by the sin in others, and all the while, it's one of those sins that we struggle with ourselves. It's like looking in a mirror, and we don't like what we see, and so we react because we struggle to deal with it in our own hearts. Jesus exposes these wrong attitudes that we don't want to take into our relationships with one another. When we see that there are faults and there are sins, we don't want to be the harsh judge, and we don't want to be the hypocrite. So how should we act? Here's the right attitude. We should be a helpful brother or a sister. Look at verse 5. You hypocrite. First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the

speck from your brother's eye. Okay, so the image is still there. There is the person that has, well, they've got a huge eye problem because they've got the plank, and then there's the person that's got the small problem. There's the speck.

But we know, don't we, if we get a speck in our own eye, it's really irritating. You know, if you get hay fever, you get pollen in there, it's horrible. Even if you get an eyelash in there, it's irritating. It's a foreign body. It needs to be removed. And Jesus is saying, we need to recognize this, it is appropriate to help a fellow believer to deal with sin and to grow in obedience.

But only from the right heart and only when our vision is right. So we're not to come trying to fix someone else's problem as the harsh judge. Rather, we're to examine our own hearts first and receive mercy first. And Jesus says we shouldn't try to fix someone else when we haven't dealt with that particular sin in our own lives. Counselors will often say, when it comes to helping someone, perhaps dealing with temptation, if you wrestle with that temptation yourself, you're probably not the right person to be able to help. But when we do have the right attitude, when we are confessing and repenting of sin, when we are receiving mercy and we want to apply it in the way we treat others, when we're operating out of a knowledge that our Father loves us and He's forgiven us, when we want the best for our brother or a sister in Christ, then and only then, we should come alongside. And we should speak the truth in love. And we should help a person to change.

John Chrysostom, one of the church fathers, he put it this way. He said, correct him, but not as an enemy, nor as an adversary exacting a penalty, but as a physician, as a doctor providing medicine. There's the right attitude. To be a brother or a sister in Christ, we want to bring healing. Like a doctor, we want ultimately to heal and not to harm. But we understand that when a surgeon goes to work, even sometimes when we go to work dealing with the irritations in our eyes, it's painful. But it's for the long-term good of a patient. Apply that to trying to correct a brother or a sister when we see them with sinful patterns or behaviors. That may bring short-term pain for them because, honestly, nobody likes to be confronted with our sin. Nobody likes initially to be shown that we are heading in a wrong way. But when we pursue their good, and as God would work, our aim is that long-term gain of a life of obedience.

[22 : 11] The right attitude, wanting to be helpful, wanting to apply grace and mercy, it requires us to have the right vision. It requires us to wear the gospel glasses. So, just as we come to a close, just to think about how in this matter of judging and dealing with people's behavior and helping people change, how do we see our need of the gospel? How does seeing the gospel help? As we are seeing the gospel, as we are living in light of the gospel, one thing it should always create in our hearts is a proper humility. You know, when we begin with ourselves, as we should, and take an honest view of our sin, as we take it to the gospel, take it to the cross, we discover that our sin, my sin, is so bad, the Son of God had to die as the only way for sin to be forgiven. If we go to the cross of Christ, it reveals to us those sins that we overlook because of our hypocrisy, because we're too busy looking at others to look at our own hearts, those things that we try and minimize in ourselves and say they're no big deal. As Jesus bore those sins upon Himself, He experienced the Father's wrath.

He experienced that sense of separation from His Father. He experienced death as the wages of sin. We can never look at the cross truly and take our sin lightly. It will always be a reminder of mercy received. So we understand that God does not give us what we deserve. When we are trusting in Jesus, what we deserve fell on His Son at Calvary. We receive mercy and forgiveness. And our Father continues to be so patient and compassionate and gracious and generous with us, so that when we put those gospel glasses on, that should change how we approach a brother or a sister. We're not coming in judgment as if we are above them. We come to show mercy because we've received it and we know we need it.

We don't come with hard hearts that are against, but soft hearts that are for, seeking their best always. Even if that involves saying hard things, sometimes it does. So seeing the gospel helps to create the necessary humility within us. But also seeing the gospel clearly creates the security that we need. And here's what I mean by that. Why is it sometimes that we find ourselves hunting out the sin in others? Why is it that we can find ourselves being really critical and harsh towards others? Sometimes at least it's because we become blind to the gospel. We're not living out of our new identity in Christ. And so we're judging others, perhaps to feel better about ourselves because we think that maybe merits God's approval. When we feel insecure, when we don't understand that all that we have rests on what Jesus has done and grace received, perhaps we're always going to tend

to minimize our own sin and maximize the sin of others because then we'll feel that we're getting along better.

It can be so easy to slip into play-acting at holiness by works rather than resting in holiness by the grace of God. But again, when we apply the lens of the gospel, we understand that God in heaven, He sees everything, even the very worst about us. You know, we can put on a mask in the world, we can airbrush, we can apply filters, but not with God. But wonderfully, our Father still loves us as His children. In Christ, He sees us as righteous. We are as loved as Jesus is loved. And when we understand that, when we understand our identity is found in Christ, there's the security. Which means I don't need to lie to others, pretending that I don't have a sin problem. I don't need to lie to myself about my sin, but rather, we can be honest. We can give up that idea of living by comparing and competing, which will always tend to make us harsh and uncharitable towards one another. So, when it comes to our relationships relationships with one another and how we deal with one another when things go wrong, we need to let the gospel correct our vision. We need to understand that God is our judge and He is our Father.

To understand that Jesus, the judge, was judged in our place so that we might receive the Father's love and mercy. And as we understand that, as we receive that, with that right view of our Father in heaven, we can find a right view of ourselves with necessary humility and awareness of our need of mercy so that we might have the right view of one another, so that we might be able to help one another to grow in faith.