

Checking Our Own Hearts

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[0 : 00] And I want to begin by asking the question, how can Jesus ask us to do something, stop doing something, sorry, how can Jesus ask us to stop doing something we do all the time?

And the thing I'm talking about is, as you've all been talking about, judging. How can Jesus ask us to stop doing something which is judging, which is something we do all the time?

And face it, that's what we do, don't we? And without thinking about it, without realizing instinctively, we judge all the time. So I'm pretty sure that at the end of my sermon, you'll form a view as to whether it's good or bad.

You might say, what's good, Mark, but you went on for five minutes too long. Or, Mark, if I were you, I would have explained judging slightly differently, by which you mean better.

And your judgment of me would even, without you doing it consciously, factor in the fact that I'm a middle-aged, bold Asian man, who is a pastor, which may shape your view of me more favorably or unfavorably, as should really be the case.

[1 : 12] Or perhaps six months ago, I may have heard you with a callous remark. And rightly or wrongly, consciously or subconsciously, that shapes your view of my sermon.

Now, all that's going on in your mind, isn't it? That thought process, it's part of judging, really, isn't it? It's not hard to see how we do it with all manner and every aspect of our life.

We take what people say and do and try and work out what they mean. We're interpreting people and situations all the time, making assessments so that we can decide if actually they are telling the truth or not.

And if you're a leader, part of your job is to assess others, isn't it? That's what we call discernment, examining someone's character or ability to decide what tasks and responsibilities you're going to give to them.

In fact, the Bible also gives us in passages like Titus and 1 Timothy qualifications for us to assess whether to appoint someone to the office of elder or overseer.

[2 : 20] So all of this really is judging, isn't it, in one sense? Now, please don't think that what I'm trying to do is negate Jesus' commands, but rather I'm recognizing what is really the reality of what we do and trying then to work out how to appropriately apply this passage in a way that makes sense and works.

So with that in mind, let's listen to Jesus in verse 1. Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged.

And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Well, the first thing to note then is the principle that the same rules apply for those who judge as with those being judged.

And so when you judge, you're actually establishing rules for yourself. Has it ever dawned on you when you are gleefully critiquing and picking apart the actions and words of others that those very same measures that you're using is what you should be living up to as well?

So, for example, we may sometimes say, Look, I admit that what he says is true, but if he had said it in a more gentle way, I would have listened to him.

- [3 : 39] Oh, really? Is that right? So you mean to tell me you never get upset when someone ignores a valid point you make just because they don't like the way you said it?
- What Jesus is pointing out is hypocrisy, isn't it? Double standards. We hate it when we see it on others, and yet when it's us, you know, we don't really like it, do we?
- Now, many of you are still children, but some of you have remembered your childhood, but you remember that when your parents used to say, Just do as I tell you, but not as I do.
- You hate that, don't you? Now, of course, those of us who are parents, we have good reasons for saying that, all right? You know, we've had a hard day, you know.
- Life has been difficult. We've been running around trying to look after our children. And what do the children have to do in return? Nothing. They just need to listen to us, isn't it? So we always think of different standards, don't we?
- [4 : 43] Of how something might apply to somebody else, but not to us. Now, ultimately, of course, the one who applies the same measure across everyone is God, isn't it?
- He's the one, actually, we have to answer to, including for our double standards. And unfortunately, God knows exactly what's in our hearts and minds. We can pretend to fool others, but we can't hide from God our motives, can we, for judging others.
- So that's why Jesus commands us not to judge, by which he means not to be judgmental. So, as I said, judging is sometimes things we need to do to assess, but being judgmental.
- Or, to use a word popular with the young people today, not to be judgy. Because when we do that, we're never going to come out roses, are we?
- Because the standards we apply to others are not normally the ones we can achieve ourselves. And Jesus says that in verse 3. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own?
- [5 : 55] How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite. Double standards. First, take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.
- Now, the Pharisees, of course, in Jesus' day were good at doing it. But sadly, I have to say, so are we. We have microscopic vision, don't we, when it comes to the fault of others.
- And yet, we're blind to our own when it's right in front of our eyes. We're so judgmental, we even criticize other people for being judgmental.
- Well, hello. What we've just done is be judgmental of other people's judgmentalism. Just last night, my wife and I and Emma, we had dinner, and we were walking through Glen Waverley after dinner.
- The shops were all closed, right? It was a bit before 9, and we were heading to Coles. And then I noticed in a distance, a group of girls, you know, young girls sitting, just, you know, talking.
- [7 : 04] And I said some comment about, I don't like it when these young girls loiter so late at night at shopping centers. Well, little did I know that when we got closer, it was actually Emma's classmates.
- And, of course, friends of Emma can never be, they're always good girls, so. Anyway, so we did our shopping, and we came back up, and then we walked past them again.
- I said, Emma, you can talk to them, you know, go say hi. And then I walked past, and then Emma said, Dad, you're being so judgy. And so I do have to confess that I was being judgmental.

But, you know, Emma was being judgy of me for being judgy as well. Now, the other thing, of course, is that when we do judging, you know, we are such experts, aren't we, in reading other people's minds and intentions, aren't we?

You know, somehow or other, we can read them just by their reactions. So someone forgets to smile at us when they walk past, and immediately we think, how rude of them.

[8 : 14] They must hate us, you know. And I learned a new phrase today, we give them the bombastic side eye, something like that, I don't know. We do that, don't we?

We just look at someone, they say something, and we immediately think we know what's going on with them and what's going through their mind. So, really, I don't know about you, but when I read this passage, I find myself, you know, saying, wow, this is so hard.

And I fall, and I fail all the time with not judging, isn't it? So, what is the remedy then to all of this? Well, I think the point of the application is this, and I put it in the outline.

Yes, we tend to do these things, and sometimes we do need to judge, but let's slow down. Let's be slow to judge others, be judgmental of others, and also quick to examine ourselves.

What I mean by that is that whenever we see ourselves thinking or judging, ask ourselves firstly, are we meant to be judging in the first place? Is it our job to do it?

[9 : 21] Is there a purpose for it? Well, there's no good reason. Then tell ourselves, stop. Consciously tell yourself, don't judge. And even if there's a valid reason to exercise judgment, well, let's not be judgmental.

Ask yourselves if the standards you are using to assess others are the same ones you happily apply to yourself. If not, consider, if I were in their shoes, what would I like to be judged against?

And perhaps use those instead. And regardless of what standards you do apply, try and see the person in their best light. Don't assume the worst of their intentions.

Don't read into things that are not clear. And if it's not clear and you need to know, ask, you know, why did you say or do this? Not why did you say this or do that, but why?

To understand, to put yourselves in their shoes. It's a hard thing to do, isn't it? But as I said, we need to keep practicing at this so that it becomes more and more habitual as time goes on.

[10 : 34] It becomes a bit more natural and instinctive rather than the judging and being judgmental. And that is, I think, the way we grow and mature in Christ. And this whole topic of judging is really related with forgiveness, isn't it?

Because imagine if God judged you by your own standards. Now, let's not even talk about God's standards, which is much more perfect than yours. Let's talk about living up to the standards we set for others.

I don't think we'll meet that standard, would we? And God would be entitled not to forgive us, isn't it? And yet, God does forgive us in Christ. When we put our faith in Jesus, God overlooks, doesn't he?

He's willing to overlook our sins on account of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. So really, if we understand, appreciate that, we ought to do the same for others, shouldn't we?

Not be judgmental, because God has not been judgmental on us. And even if we need to judge, to do it carefully and humbly, showing grace, because we too have received grace from God.

[11 : 41] Now, verse 6, when we come to it, looks a bit odd, but I think Jesus puts it there in order to help us not to go to the other extreme. Because he just said that you are able to first take out the plank of your eye and then remove the speck from your brother's eye.

So he's not saying you never remove specks from other people. There is a place to correct others. There is a place to say what is right and what is wrong.

However, there are times that even when we do that sensitively, gently, doing it all the right way, that there will still be times when it will come back to bite us.

That the response we hope for from the other person isn't good, because they're not open to correction. And in those situations, Jesus says, well, let's leave things be. We don't have to keep throwing good advice at them in the hope that we might change them.

So in verse 6, Jesus says, do not give dogs what is sacred. Do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet and turn and tear you to pieces. Now, I think this principle can apply in a multiple situation.

[12 : 54] So it applies when we share the gospel with others as well. But here, I think the general point Jesus is making is that we ought to discern when sometimes it's not worth to keep pushing on, that we should try, but then stop.

Because otherwise, we're throwing something precious like pearls at pigs. Now, Jesus uses quite a derogatory picture. Dogs and pigs are senseless, feral animals who only know to destroy and devour.

And in Jesus' days, probably he was thinking of the Pharisees, who always thought they knew the best, thumb their noses at Jesus' words, treat the gospel with disdain.

So the picture then is that they're just quaffing down his words, not really thinking or reflecting on it, and then just spitting it out and rejecting it and trampling on it. And, you know, we can be guilty of this as well.

You know, when we're defensive and self-righteous, when people criticize us, instead of really just working out what the truth is so that we can apply it. But I think the main application here is the other way around, where Jesus is saying, when we do that and we're met with rejection, let's not be disheartened.

[14 : 06] Let's not be too quick to judge others and too quick to stop trying. But it does come a point when, if people keep resisting our good intentions, then it's okay.

It's okay to leave things and to move on. We don't need to take it personally, because otherwise we end up feeding pearls to pigs. All right.

Now let's turn instead to what is the more important task, and that's to examine and judge ourselves rather than others. And so that's from verse 7 onwards. You see, as we've been looking at the first half, from verses 1 to 5, we might hopefully come to the conclusion actually that we're not very good, are we?

That we fail. We fall short of what God requires and what his righteousness demands. So the second half really is to then help us to respond.

It doesn't explicitly talk about judging ourselves, but it is a natural response when we realize that we have planks in our eyes. What we do then is to turn to God.

[15 : 13] It's a humbling thing, but it's a good thing, because we're in the position then that God can bless us and answer our prayers. So verse 7 says, Ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Now, I think that these verses are often taken out of context.

It often, if you read it in isolation, sounds like this is an open checkbook from God. So, you know, you want a new Tesla? Just ask, and it will be given to you.

You want your mortgage paid off? You know, ask, and God will give it to you. That dream job when you graduate? You know, just knock on that door, and it will be opened for you.

Now, of course, if you think like that, then you've misapplied this passage, isn't it? Just like last week, we were talking about how we needed to read the Lord's Prayer in its context. So today, we ought to read this in its context as well.

[16 : 18] In the immediate context of chapter 7, verse 1 to 5, but also in the wider context of the sermon. So I'm going to pause here. I'll give you a chance to think about this and talk to the person next to you.

But where else in the sermon have we encountered this idea of asking and seeking? Where has Jesus talked about this before? So have a think and see if you can come up with a few, a couple of instances, and then, you know, some of you might be able to share your answers with us.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Okay.

[17 : 42] Okay. I've got two examples or two verses, but does anyone want to... throw up their hands, surely?

Just do a word search in the Bible. Anyone? The Lord's Prayer. Who said that? Amanda.

Amanda, cool. Okay. How so? Yes. Good. Give.

Give. The word give there. Yes. Good. Any others? So that's the asking bit. Anyone for the seeking bit? Peter? Yep.

Can you remember the verse number? 633. Yeah. Good. Any others? Okay. Okay. 633 is one of those I've got.

[18 : 48] So on the next slide, Peter's right. Jesus did say, in the last passage, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you.

Okay. So the word give. And then the other one, Amanda's close to the Lord's Prayer. Just before that, in verse 7 and 8, it says, do not keep babbling like the pagans.

Do not be like them, for your father knows what you need before you ask him. And then straight away, of course, Jesus then say, this is how you should ask, which is the Lord's Prayer. So in its context then, in the wider context of the sermon, it's clear that what God is asking us to do, really, is to seek the things that we have to ask and seek, is his righteousness and his kingdom, isn't it?

And secondly, that as we ask, we are to ask in accordance with what he's given us in the Lord's Prayer. So asking for forgiveness, asking for not being led into temptation, asking for God's will to be done, things like that.

And in an immediate context of chapter 7, verse 1 to 5, it's when we realize that we are prone to judging and neglecting the plank in our eyes, that yes, we are to ask God, aren't we?

[20 : 01] To help us, not to judge. We are to thirst for that sort of righteousness that is gracious, and asking God to answer those prayers.

And of course, because this is such a thing that we need to grow into, it is something that we keep doing, not just once, but over and over again. And that's why the verbs in that section there, in verse 7, is a present continuous tense.

So ask and keep asking is what it means. Seek and keep seeking. Knock and keep knocking. Because we are meant to do it over and over again. Do it with an earnestness of coming back to God with all our heart and with all our minds trying to seek these things.

And similar with our Old Testament reading today, isn't it? That God said to those in exile that they are to seek him with all their heart. Even though they are far away in exile, God said to them, on the next slide, for I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Then you will call on me, ask, come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart.

[21 : 21] All your heart, isn't it? And then the promise that God gives in response is, I will be found by you and will bring you back from captivity.

So the picture really is that God is standing there, isn't he, with open arms, ready to answer us, ready to welcome us back if we've fallen far short of his standard.

He doesn't mind, does he, how far, how inadequate we are, how far short we are. He wants us to ask and seek and to keep doing it because what he really desires is to bless us and answer us in accordance with what is in his will.

And so Jesus makes this similar assurance in verse 9. He compares God to us, which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? For if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, then how much more will your Father in heaven, who is perfect and good, give good gifts, even better good gifts, to those who ask him?

[22 : 31] God stands, doesn't he, ready to give us his very best gift. And he's already given us his very best in his son Jesus. But now he wants to keep blessing us as we keep asking him for the blessings that flow out of being in God's kingdom, of being in Christ's body.

But we need to understand, of course, that these good gifts are what he talks about in the Sermon on the Mount, not the earthly pleasures that we may want, the things which thieves and mobs can destroy, but rather righteousness, his kingdom, his will.

If we desire these things, then, of course, God will give it to us abundantly. So, what then are some of these things you wish to ask from God?

As you've heard and read the passage tonight, what qualities of the kingdom do you really seek after? Let's channel our efforts to asking for those things in our prayer, rather than spending our energy being judgmental of others.

All right. Let's finish then with the last verse, verse 12. Next week, when we get to verses 13 to 29, that's the last bit of the Sermon on the Mount. But it's really almost like a challenge.

[23 : 52] How do you respond after you've heard what Jesus has said all the way up to this point? And so, verse 12 almost sounds like the end of the lesson, if you like. A summary statement.

So, he says, so in everything, do to others what you have done them do to you, for this sums, this summarizer, sums up the law and the prophets. Jesus is saying, when you boil things down to it, it's really just about how you treat others.

Do you treat them the way you want them to be treated? Is, I think, the thrust of this passage tonight. Now, don't take me the wrong way. It's not about treating them as though you're trying to, you know, I like to be treated like that, so I want them to treat me like that.

I'm going to treat them like that. It's not about imposing our own preferences and personalities on others. You know, for example, some people I know in a disagreement like to talk things out. And so, if I like to talk things out, you better talk to me when other people actually, they prefer to have some time to reflect in silence before they talk.

So, I'm not talking about that way of treating others, but rather, it's about the things we have in common, isn't it, that we all desire to be treated with respect, to be given a voice when things affect us, to be understood rather than to have the worst assumed of us.

[25 : 11] And if you boil it down again, it's really just the Old Testament commandment, isn't it, love your neighbor as yourself, which Jesus describes as the second great commandment.

Hence why he says it's the sum of the law and the prophets. Of course, he also said that the first great commandment was to love God with all your heart, but Jesus doesn't talk about it here because the focus in this last part of the sermon is about treating one another and living and loving others.

But if we love God, really, which is the first great commandment, then we would want to follow Jesus, wouldn't we, and take everything he says in the sermon about treating one another into account and therefore to keep asking God for Christ's righteous character so that we can then treat one another as God would and be a blessing in his kingdom.

All right, I'm going to leave it at that, but on the screen now I've actually got three questions for you to just reflect on. You may want to take it away. I'm going to leave it up there.

You may want to take it away to think about a bit further for the week. in response to this passage, but perhaps you want to do that right now as well, just by yourself. The first question is about judging others.

[26 : 25] What things or situations do I find myself judging others in the way that the Lord commands us not to? And if you do find yourself judging too much, then the second question, in those situations, what steps can I take to help me not to be judgmental?

And then thirdly, once we realize that we've still got work to do after we've examined ourselves, what aspects of righteousness am I in most need of asking from God?

So let me leave you with those questions. You might want to pray to God and ask God even as you sit and then I will end with prayer. Father, forgive us when we are quick to be judgmental.

Help us instead to seek to do unto others what we want done to us. Help us to consider the planks in our own eyes before we look at the specks in others.

Teach us to come to you with all our shortcomings, to ask that you can change us and give to us the qualities of the kingdom and then Lord give it to us. In the name of Jesus we pray.

[27 : 37] Amen.