

"Judgement"

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[0 : 0 0] All right, we are picking up Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 7, verses 1 through 6. Let me read this for us. Jesus says this to His disciples, "Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or 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? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you." Well, if there's one verse that maybe culturally we seem to love in the Sermon on the Mount, isn't it this one? Verse 1, "'Don't judge, judge not.'" Of course, we think we love this verse because we think maybe what Jesus is saying is that no one else can tell me how to live my life. It seems to align so perfectly with our expressive individualism.

Jesus seems to be saying, judge not, that no one has the right to tell anyone else whether what they're doing is right or wrong, or whether how they're living their life is pleasing to God, or whether the path that we're on is the path of flourishing. Just let each other live. Don't judge.

judge. But even a cursory glance at the rest of this passage, let alone the rest of the New Testament, it starts to unsettle our initial excitement that Jesus is here giving us a blanket approval to live however we want to live and to tell others to mind their own business. In the rest of the passage, Jesus is clearly calling us to be morally discerning toward one another, right? After all, verse 5 ends with a picture of fellow Christians genuinely helping one another to remove the specks in their eyes.

And verse 6, well, verse 6, we're going to get to that. But let's just keep in mind, the same Jesus who uttered verse 1, judge not, also spoke verse 6, like four verses later, right? Don't throw your pearls to pigs.

So, clearly, there's something more robust going on here than Jesus merely giving us fodder to cry, you're not the judge of me. So, what really is going on in this passage?

[2 : 58] Well, remember what Jesus is doing in the entire Sermon on the Mount. He's teaching His disciples how to live as members of a new kingdom, as members of God's kingdom. The kingdoms of this world, of course, operate according to certain values and principles. But God's kingdom is something new, breaking into the old, offering a new way to live. And this new way to live that's empowered by the Spirit of God, with Jesus as our King, will mean new relationships. New relationships not only to the stuff, of this world, but also to one another, to each other as fellow humans. This is where we're at in the Sermon on the Mount, how life in the kingdom changes our relationships. We've seen over the past two weeks at the end of chapter 6 how life in God's kingdom radically changes how we approach the material stuff of this world, where once we were dominated by greed on the one hand and anxiety on the other, now we live in the freedom of our heavenly Father's care, living for a treasure that no earthly wealth could amount to. We're no longer ruled by wealth, by money, by material possessions, either by the lack of it in anxiety or the abundance of it in greed. Okay, now here in chapter 7, Jesus turns from our relationship to the stuff of this world to our relationships with one another. And, you know, if outside of God's kingdom material stuff can have a ruling power over us, how much more so can other people? The opinions and actions of others can likewise exert a sort of control over us. And just as our approach to material wealth seems to have two sides, greed for wanting more, anxiety for not having enough, so our relationship to others seems to have two sides. And we see those two sides here in verses 1 through 6. On the one hand, we can live in constant judgment of others, a constant spirit of criticism and condemnation. That's what Jesus points out in verses 1 through 5. But on the other hand, we can live in constant approval of others, a constant spirit of affirmation and acceptance. And this is what Jesus alludes to in verse 6 with the proverbial saying about throwing our pearls to pigs. And isn't this the kind of back and forth, the pendulum swing that we too often live in in this world? On the one hand, people are all bad. On the other hand, people are all good. On the one hand, I can't help but judge people. On the other hand, I can't help but please people. And notice how both of those kind of responses can take on a sort of Christian-y veneer, right? Both can sound like we're being faithful to

God. In the first case, we think, well, God cares about truth and righteousness, so we have to speak truth and bring prophetic words. On the other hand, we think, well, God is a God of love and patience and grace, so that means we have to accept everyone and accept everything and never say no and never be clear about who is and who isn't a genuine disciple of Jesus.

But I think what Jesus is showing us here is that both of those ways of approaching others, they stem from a failure to understand the gospel rightly and a failure to understand ourselves rightly. In the kingdom of God, you see, we're actually freed from people judging and people pleasing. We're freed from the need to judge people and from the need to please people.

So, let's look at the two halves of this passage then, where Jesus explores our relationships in light of God's kingdom. First, we're freed from the need to judge people. This is verses 1 through 5.

Let's start back in verse 1. Judge not that you be not judged. As we said, to judge here means to be critical. It means to be condemning, to have a spirit that always looks for what's wrong with someone else. Now, how can you spot this judgmental attitude in yourself? Well, one way is if you find that you're often ascribing motives to others. If you assume you know why someone is doing what they do, well, so-and-so said that because they're looking for attention, or, well, you know so-and-so, they always do that because they think they're better than everyone else. But to presume to know why someone is doing something, to presume we know their motives without actually talking to them, that's a sure sign we're in the territory of a judgmental spirit.

[7 : 52] Of course, the spirit can show up in less subtle ways, like when we're just always talking about what's wrong with other people. This person thinks that, that person does this, right? Or when we major on the minors, did you see what so-and-so did? They actually went to the movies, and it was an R-rated movie. I know that because I was in the R-rated movie, but they were there too.

And of course, that's a silly example, right? But how often do we judge and condemn each other for things about which God has given us freedom? We look at a brother or sister and think, if you were a Christian, you wouldn't drive that sort of car. If you were a Christian, you wouldn't send your kids to that sort of school, and on and on and on. Well, what does Jesus say?

He says two things here, actually, to kind of shake us out of this judgmental mindset and put us back in the right frame of mind, the right kind of kingdom-centered frame of mind as His disciples. First thing He says is that there is a true judge, and your life will come under His scrutiny.

Judge not that you be not judged, for with the judgment you pronounced, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Now, Jesus is saying more in these first two verses than just what goes around comes around. Or, you know, if you're critical and condemning to others, they'll be critical and condemning right back. Now, of course, that is true, right? How many communities just devolve into constant criticism and complaint because of that? But I think Jesus is pointing out something more profound here than just that kind of what goes around comes around sort of thing. It's more likely that Jesus is pointing us here not to the kind of judgment of our fellow human beings, but to the judgment of God. God will be the one who ultimately assesses our lives. He created us, He sustains us, and it is to God that we are ultimately and rightly accountable. So, Jesus is pointing us to that divine judgment. Now, it's important to ask, what sort of divine judgment does Jesus have in view here? When He says, you will be judged, what judgment does He have in mind? Now, it's helpful to remember that in the New Testament, there are at least two kinds of judgment spoken of, and we're going to look at both of those.

On the one hand, there's a judgment with respect to our sins and our ultimate standing before God, the sort of ultimate judgment. Has the chasm of our sins been forgiven or not? Have we been reconciled to God or not? Have we been adopted into God's family, or do we remain separated and at enmity with Him? That is the first sort of judgment that the New Testament speaks of.

[10 : 46] And friends, that judgment has no degrees. You're not more or less saved when it comes to that judgment. Either we have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ, or we remain under God's just wrath for our sins. And the message of the gospel, the good news, is that all who admit their sin and turn from it and take hold of the risen Christ through faith are completely forgiven and reconciled to God as their Father. By receiving Jesus Christ through nothing more than faith, through no works of your own, you're given the right to be called a child of God. You've been brought from death to life, from condemnation in your sins to justification because of Christ's righteousness.

And if that's true of you, if you've come to entrust yourself to Christ to rest in His everlasting love and mercy, then there's no going back. You can't fall out of that divine favor you've been given.

You're His forevermore. Your sins are washed away. You're a child of God forever. And when God makes all things new in the fullness of His kingdom, you will spend eternity reigning with Him.

So, this is the first sort of judgment that the New Testament speaks of. But there's a second judgment that the New Testament talks about, and this one applies to those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. For those who are reconciled to God in Christ, who are now sons and daughters of God and dwelt by His Spirit, the New Testament is clear that there will be a final accounting of our lives, a final assessment of how we've lived our lives. In one place, the Apostle Paul likens it to building a building.

Throughout our lives as Christians, through cooperation with the Holy Spirit, it's like we're building a house with our lives. And some of the things that we build with are like gold and silver and precious stones, but other things are like wood and hay and straw. And in the end, some of those things that we build with will last forever, but other things will be burned away.

[12:57] In other words, as Christians, what we do matters in this life, and what we do will have eternal value. Some of our works done in concert with the Spirit in obedience to Christ and love for Him will be like gold and silver that'll last forever.

But some of our works done in that old self-centeredness, grieving the Spirit will be like straw that gets burned up. Now, to be clear, this second sort of judgment, this final assessment of our lives as Christians does not determine whether or not you will spend eternity with God. If you're in Christ, your sins are forgiven, and you need not fear separation from Him. Through faith in Christ, sin and death and hell hold no power over you. You're His forever. But the New Testament does give very clear indications that this second sort of judgment will determine the degree of your reward and joy in the life to come. If we reap, we will sow. If we sow to love, to mercy, to righteousness, to perseverance, we will reap an abundant measure in the fullness of the kingdom.

But if we use our lives now to sow to judgmentalism, to criticism, the condemnation of our brothers and sisters, impatience, anger, hatred, suspicion, then our harvest will be very meager in the future God has in store. Jesus says very clear here, with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

If you're stingy and unmerciful towards your brothers and sisters in Christ, if you're always critical and condemning, if you never give them any amount of mercy or understanding, then that will be the sort of judgment you will face when you stand before God on the last day. The same measure you use to judge others will be measured back to you. So, Jesus wants us to lift our eyes to that final assessment on the last day of our lives. How would you like to be received on that last day by your heavenly Father?

With mercy, with compassion, with understanding, with grace? Then treat your brothers and sisters in Christ now with that same sort of mercy. But of course, as Jesus lifts our eyes to the judgment seat, as it were, we remember standing there before the judgment seat that ultimately, apart from grace, we would have no standing at all. Right? This goes back to that first judgment. The banner that flies over our lives as Christians is a banner of sheer mercy, of judgment that has been stayed, of a holy God who has become our Father because He satisfied the law on our behalf.

[16:00] The rightful judge of all the world, the Lord Jesus Christ, was judged for us. So, how could we ever be judgmental towards others? And this brings us to the second way Jesus is shaking us out of our judgmental mindset here. In verses 3 through 4, Jesus reminds us how greatly we need mercy so that we might be merciful to others. This is a famous and memorable image. Jesus says, how can you be so outraged by the speck of dust, the little bit of sawdust in your brother's eye, in your sister's eye, when you fail to realize that you have a log swinging out of your own?

Jesus wants us, of course, to be doing the delicate work of helping to remove the specks of sin from each other's eyes. We need that help from one another. But that work of spiritual eye surgery, as it were, it's delicate work, and it's careful work. It's not something to be done with hasty or angry or judgmental spirits. And certainly, we will not be able to do that work if we ignore the sin in our own lives. No, not until we recognize that any sin we see in others is nothing compared to the sin in our own lives. Not until then will we be able to be the sort of spiritual community of mutual care that Jesus calls us to be. This is one of the reasons why we take time every Sunday in our services to confess our sins to God. We confess our sins every Sunday not to wallow in guilt, but to again experience the forgiveness of Christ so that we might be humble, compassionate, and rightly gentle before Him and before each other. There's nothing more deadly than pride, and nothing will turn spiritually curious people away faster than a proud, self-righteous attitude in a church. Paul could say, I'm the chief of sinners. The tax collector in Jesus' parable could say,

Lord, have mercy on me, the sinner. Only when we acknowledge the log in our own eye can we see clearly to do the spiritual work of caring for others in their failures and mistakes.

So, brothers and sisters, do you see your own log, as it were? Have you spent time grieving your own sin?

Have you confessed your sin to God and to others where appropriate? If you struggle to identify the log in your own eye, chances are you're probably swinging it around and hitting people with it. So, if you're ready to get serious with God and to get humble before God and others, then you might ask someone you trust, where am I missing my own sin? Can you help me take the log out of my eye?

[19 : 20] God. And the beautiful thing is, God will answer that sort of prayer. Isaiah tells us that God is near to the humble and contrite in heart. And in a community where that is true, we will not only be able to help one another grow in grace, but others will look in and say, surely God is in their midst.

The world is so full of shrill judgment and criticism, but the church, the community of kingdom people is not meant to be a place of judgment, but of real discernment, where sinners aren't condemned or excused but helped. May we be that sort of community.

Now, let's turn to the second part of our passage. We've seen in verses 1 through 5 how Jesus says that living in God's kingdom frees us from judging others. Now, in verse 6, He looks at the opposite tendency. If the kingdom frees us from people judging, it also frees us from people pleasing.

So, what does it mean to give holy things to dogs or to throw pearls to pigs? Well, most people have read this statement of Jesus to mean that if you're sharing the gospel with someone and eventually you realize that they're just too recalcitrant and hard-hearted and combative to receive it, then in wisdom you should move on to others and entrust that person to God's hands.

And there are examples where Jesus tells His disciples to do just that. When you enter a village, Jesus says, after sending the disciples out two by two, if they do not receive you, shake the dust from your feet and move on to the next town. And we see the Apostle Paul in Acts doing the same thing.

[21 : 05] He would arrive in a new city. First, He would preach in the synagogue to His fellow Jews, but there would come a point when, if they rejected the message, He would turn to the Gentiles.

So, perhaps, perhaps that's what Jesus is getting at here in the Sermon on the Mount. Be discerning, be wise, be a good steward of your time and energy. And most Christians who've taken this reading have acknowledged that we need to be very careful when we apply this rule. One of the great evangelists of the 20th century, John Stott, said, you know, in my ministry I've only known one or two people for whom I could say that was true, where I needed to just move on. But I think there might be a slightly better way to understand what Jesus is getting at here in verse 6. The preceding verses, after all, are not about evangelism, but they're about rendering judgment, right? They're about not giving an uncritically harsh or judgmental verdict when you encounter others. But, you know, there's a flip side to that coin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I think, captured this best in his comments on this verse. He says, it's not only judging words which are forbidden to the disciples, but proclaiming salvific words of forgiveness to others also has its limits.

What is the pearl that we have in the church of Jesus Christ? It is the gospel. It's the assurance that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, sins can be utterly forgiven, and humans can be made right with their Creator.

That total peace with God, that is the pearl of great price. That is worth selling everything you own to get it. And the church has the astounding privilege of saying on the basis of the gospel to those who receive Christ, your sins are forgiven.

But friends, it is not true that everyone has genuinely received Christ, and it's not true that everyone's sins have been forgiven. Not everyone is in Christ.

[23 : 37] Some people may be very moral. Some people may be very religious. Some people may do much good in society. But if they have not admitted their sin before a holy Creator and acknowledge their need for God, they are not a Redeemer. And if they have not trusted in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, then they are not reconciled to God, and they remain outside the kingdom of God.

And when churches don't make this distinction, it causes all sorts of problems, Jesus says. If we give people the impression that they are Christians when they are not, no matter what our motives might be, Jesus says it's demeaning to the gospel, and it's damaging to the church. Look at the second half of verse 6, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. What is it that gets trampled underfoot?

The holy things, the pearl, this priceless message of the forgiveness of sins, the forgiveness of our sins paid for willingly by Jesus' death on the cross, gets trampled underfoot. How could we treat this beautiful thing as something to just be bandied about?

How eager we are at times as followers of Jesus to label celebrities or movements or nations as Christian.

We think that if this or that famous person or this or that movement could be known as Christian, well, maybe the esteem of Christianity would grow in the public eye. But friends, God does not need the help of any celebrity or any nation or any movement to increase His fame and His glory.

[25 : 43] Yes, we should rejoice when men and women genuinely repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ. You may have read recently about the founder of Wikipedia who recently became a Christian.

As far as I can tell from what he's written, it seems his faith is genuine. We should praise God for that. But friends, the gospel doesn't need celebrity endorsements.

Let's treat the gospel like what it really is, the most valuable thing in the entire world. It's not a commodity to be bought and sold and advertised and thrown around at our whim.

But, you know, if we give people the impression that they are Christians when they are not, it doesn't just demean the gospel, it also damages the church. Sadly, I've been to church services where the Lord's Supper is celebrated, and the pastor will say something like, it doesn't matter where you are in your spiritual journey.

You can be a believer in Christ, or you can be an agnostic, or an atheist, or anywhere in between. It doesn't matter. Jesus welcomes everyone, so you should come and eat and drink the bread and cup with us. But don't you see what's wrong there?

[26 : 59] Yes, on the one hand, it is wonderfully true that Jesus welcomes everyone. Absolutely anyone and everyone who flees to Jesus for rescue will be saved.

Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest, Jesus said. That is wonderfully true. And if you are ready for the weight of your sin to be lifted, and for the peace of God to flood your soul, then come to Jesus and believe.

Jesus welcomes everyone. But the reality is, not everyone has accepted the invitation. Yes, He stands at the door and knocks, but not everyone has opened and let Him come in.

The Lord's Supper is for those who have surrendered their lives to Christ, who have said yes to His offer of salvation, who have obeyed His command to repent and believe. The Lord's Supper is the meal of assurance.

The church serves this meal on behalf of Jesus as a way of saying to Christians, you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to you.

[28 : 18] As intimately as you eat this bread and drink this cup, that is how intimately is your union with your Savior through faith. And that means, friends, that we cannot serve this bread and cup to anyone and everyone, regardless of where they are spiritually.

Interestingly, in the early church, one of the first ways in which Matthew 7, 6 is applied is in an ancient church manual called the Didache, and this is exactly how they applied it.

Don't give these precious things to just anybody. We can't do it. Because in the first place, it's not loving to the person taking the bread and the cup.

For then, they're led to believe that it doesn't really matter where one stands with Christ. Right? If anyone can just come and eat and drink, then what does it matter what I do with Jesus?

In the second place, it's very damaging to the church. The church is meant to be a community that is bound together by the gospel. But if genuine belief in the gospel is not required for being welcomed as a visible member of the church, then something else is at the center.

[29 : 36] Now, of course, in our public gatherings, anyone is welcome to come and join us here. You might be anywhere on the spiritual map. We're glad you're here. But to be known visibly as a follower of Jesus to take this bread and this cup requires a belief in the gospel because that's what binds us together as a church.

And if it's not the gospel that's binding us together, what is it? Social justice? Family values?

Love and acceptance? Friends, if you replace the gospel with any of those things in the center of the life of the church, that church will soon become lifeless and hollow.

Conflict will eventually arise. Conflicts will arise because what unites the church then isn't the living Lord Jesus, but your or my social program.

And who's to say your social program or my social program is the better one? So churches devolve into conflict, schism, and judgmentalism because they're not willing to discern the gospel.

[30 : 54] So what's the point? Well, as we take stock of this passage as a whole, the point is this, friends. The message of the kingdom, the message of the cross that Jesus came not just to preach but to accomplish through His life, death, and resurrection.

The gospel is a word of both judgment and acceptance. On the cross, our sins were judged, and on the cross, our sins were forgiven.

And that means our relationships are put onto a whole new footing. On the one hand, we know that sins need to be forgiven through Christ alone. No one is naturally a good person.

We are all of us like the prodigal son who wander far from our Father and who wake up in the midst of the mud and the pigs. The cross says we need to be forgiven, so don't just call everyone a Christian.

We don't give people false assurance when they haven't trusted in Christ for themselves. We need to be forgiven. But the cross also says we can be forgiven.

[32 : 03] We can be forgiven. No one is a lost cause. No one is a helpless case. How do we know this? Because, friends, everyone who has genuinely met their Savior knows how big the logs in our own eyes are.

And if God can forgive me, if God can forgive you, then surely He can forgive anything in your life. All right, let's pray.

Father, some of us are more prone to one side of this passage than the other. Father, some of us are quick to judge, and some of us never want to make a distinction between being lost and found, between right and wrong.

Father, help us to see that the cross is what we all need. By your Spirit, would the fact of Jesus' death for our sins cure our pride and make us compassionate towards sinners?

But would the cross also cure our cowardice, our fear of man, and make us bold and confident?

[33 : 25] In other words, Father, make us people who really know what it means to love. Jesus, You can do this in us by Your Spirit because You lived perfectly and You promised to make us more like Yourself.

So as we come to Your table now, work in us through this bread and cup to enrich our communion with You through faith. Soften our hearts where they need to be softened.

Lord, strengthen our hearts where they need to be strengthened. And may the pearl of the gospel shine brightly in our souls and in our church.

Amen.