

week #26

Upside Down Aspirations

SMALL GROUPS

Avoiding Improper Judgments

“Human beings are naturally prone to focus on the failings of others and ignore their own heinous sins.”

Coram Deo

“No earthly judge is perfect, but we can make judgments without hypocrisy if we live a life of repentance and endeavor to mortify our own sin.”

Study

Open It
Explore It
Get It

“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” (vv. 1–2). Matthew 7:1–6

Avoiding Improper Judgments

Today’s passage from the gospel of Matthew opens with probably the most misused text in our day. More often than not, any ethical evaluation the church makes is countered with “judge not,” as if Jesus tells His people not to make any judgments whatsoever. This misinterpretation of our Lord’s teaching in Matthew 7:1–6 is employed by unbelievers and professing Christians alike, and it contributes to the moral and doctrinal anarchy evident in our culture.

However, Christ is most certainly not forbidding His people from issuing judgments altogether. In

fact, Jesus in this same gospel orders us to discriminate between good and evil. We must differentiate those receptive to us from the dogs and the swine in order to obey Jesus and hold back what is sacred from those who are proud to hate our Lord (v. 6). We cannot approach those who have honest questions about the Gospel like we do those who seek instruction in order to use it against Christ and His church. Our Lord’s directions for church discipline (18:15–20) call us to evaluate others. Exercising discernment and making sound judgments is part of Christian discipleship.

Jesus is actually warning us to be fair and humble when we make our evaluations. **Human beings are naturally prone to focus on the failings of others and ignore their own heinous sins.** Consider David’s reaction to Nathan after he slept with Bathsheba and had Uriah murdered (2 Sam. 11:1–12:15a). The king did more evil than the man in Nathan’s parable, but David wanted to chase after the speck in that man’s eye, so blinded was he by the plank of his own sin. Today, church leaders who have gossiped might come down mercilessly on someone who has occasionally



Coram Deo

Before the face of God

John Calvin says that the one “who judges according to the word and law of the Lord, and forms his judgment by the rule of charity, always begins with subjecting himself to examination, and preserves a proper medium and order in his judgments.” No earthly judge is perfect, but we can make judgments without hypocrisy if we live a life of repentance and endeavor to mortify our own sin. Are you more critical of others than you are of yourself?¹

(Continued)

used lewd language. This latter sin is real and inexcusable, but we have done wrong when we who judge do not hold ourselves to the same standard by which we judge others (Matt. 7:2).

John Chrysostom says, “Jesus does not forbid judging but commands that one first remove the plank from one’s own eye” (*Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 23.2). We must be harsher on ourselves than we are on others. Let us make sure our consciences are clear before we judge our brothers and sisters.

Open It!

- 1) Which one represents you best in times of conflict: judge, prosecutor or defense attorney?

- 2) Describe a time when you had to go to court. What were you there for? What feelings did you have while there?

Read It | Matthew 7:1- 6

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Explore It

1. To what extent does Jesus say we will be judged?
2. What should we do before we go around looking to remove specks from others' eyes?
3. According to Jesus, what things must we not give to animals?

Get It

This is the Bible verse that seems to be most popular in our present day. But most of the people who quote this verse don't understand what Jesus said. They seem to think Jesus commanded a universal acceptance of any lifestyle or teaching. If we see what Jesus said in Matthew 7:15-16, He commands us to know people by the fruit of their life, and some sort of assessment is necessary for that. The Christian is called to unconditionally love. But the Christian is not called to unconditional approval. We really can love people who do things that should not be approved of. Instead, Jesus is speaking against being judgmental, that is, judging motives and the inner man, which only God can know. We can judge the fruit of a man, but we can rarely judge their motives with accuracy.²


(Continued)

Jesus is not saying we should never pass any sort of judgment. Every day we make hundreds of judgments about things around us. It is not wrong, for instance, to sit on a jury and render a verdict. Nor is it wrong for an admissions committee to decide which students to accept and which to reject. Nor is it wrong for an employer to decide who gets a promotion and who doesn't. Nor is it wrong for schools to judge certain students worthy of high honor at graduation. Nor is it wrong for Glenbrook North High School to expel the students who participated in that ugly hazing incident and to ban them from attending graduation ceremonies. We all have to make decisions every day that involve other people. We pass judgment on appearance, behavior, speech, deportment, attitude, work ethic, productivity, keeping or breaking a promise, guilt or innocence, which person we believe and which person we do not believe. Whatever the words of Jesus mean, they can't mean that we never pass judgment in any sense at any time.³

1. How have you heard or seen people use verse 3 wrongly? Why are people so quick to use this verse when confronted about something?
2. In what way will we be judged if we judge others hypocritically? Will this judging come from others, God or both?
3. Amidst the dozens of judgments we make on a weekly basis, how do we know if our judgments are biblical?

Sermon on the Mount, Kent Hughes

We set the standard and tone for our own final judgment by our judgmental conduct in life. And we prove by our judging of others that we know what is right. So if we do not do what is right, we condemn ourselves. Do I claim to have an exceptional knowledge and grasp of Scripture? I will be judged accordingly. Do I claim to have been an especially wise and discerning servant? I will be judged according to the position I have assumed. If we set ourselves as authorities and judges over others, we should not be surprised or complain when we are judged by our own standard. We need to face and apply this text with all its fearful force.



4. Based on the statement above from Kent Hughes, do you want to be judged by others and God with the same measure you judge? Explain your answer.

5. Consider three possible reasons someone might take a judgmental attitude toward others:

- to feel better about themselves
- to avoid thinking about their own faults
- because they see similar weaknesses in themselves

Have you ever been judgmental toward someone for one of these reasons? Talk about how you could have done things differently.

6. Does this passage mean we should never approach or confront someone who is doing something wrong? Why or why not?

7. Read the following passages and talk about what each teaches us regarding confrontation:

- Proverbs 9:8
- Proverbs 13:1
- Proverbs 25:12
- Proverbs 28:23

8. What specks bother you about others? Why do they cause you such consternation?

9. Assuming “the speck” Jesus refers to is a particle of dust that irritates the eye compared to the long plank of wood in our own eye, what does this say about what we see in others and what we see in our own life? Why is this so?

10. What are the planks in your eye (areas in your life needing correction)? What causes you to not notice them?

Dogs and swine describe profane people who treat spiritual matters with contempt. They are unbelievers who are enemies of the gospel and are people to avoid. This verse does not mean that the blessings of the gospel are not to be offered to the Gentiles (remembering that Jews in Jesus' day frequently referred to Gentiles as dogs), but rather that precious spiritual truths should not be pressed upon

those who are either unready or unwilling to accept or appreciate their value. The verse continues logically in the train of thought developed in the sayings which immediately precede it. While judging others is not the prerogative of man, there are, nonetheless, those whose uncleanness and violence prevent the sharing of the most noble truths of the Christian faith.

11. What implications does verse 6 make in our interactions when it comes to judging the unbeliever? Should we call out every sin or injustice? How do we know when to speak up about sin?

12. In what practical ways can we begin to show more balanced judgment that has both grace and truth? Which one do you need to show more of to others this week?

¹ R.C. Sproul, *Blessed Are The Persecuted From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org*

² David Guzik Commentary on Matthew.

³ Ray Pritchard, *Matthew 7:1-5 Judge Not!*