

Sermons on Matthew

Look, A Plank!

Matthew 7:1-6

With Study Questions

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Matthew 7:1-6

Judge not, that you be not judged.⁻²⁻ For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.⁻³⁻ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?⁻⁴⁻ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?⁻⁵⁻ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.⁻⁶⁻ Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. (Matthew 7:1-6)

Preface

In ancient Persia, a certain corrupt judge who accepted a bribe to render a false verdict was ordered executed by King Cambyses. The judge's skin was then used to cover the judgment seat. Subsequent judges were forced to render their judgments while sitting on that chair, as a reminder of the consequences of perverting justice.¹

God detests a false witness. It is a violation of the Ninth Commandment. In God's judicial system a false witness is to receive the same punishment that he was seeking to have implemented upon the alleged perpetrator (Deuteronomy 19:16-19). So someone who testifies falsely in a murder trial is to be executed. God is very concerned with the protection of the innocent (Proverbs 6:17). Improper judgments have dire consequences.

Thus far in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He instructs us not to:

- Disregard the Law of God (Matthew 5:17)
- Do our good deeds to be seen by men (Matthew 6:1)
- Pray like the hypocrites (Matthew 6:5)
- Fast with a sad countenance (Matthew 6:16)
- Lay up treasures on earth but in heaven (Matthew 6:19)
- Worry about our lives (Matthew 6:25)

Don't Judge

Now we are instructed not to judge others. And this comes with a strong warning—if we judge, we'll be judged. The method of judgment we

¹ John MacArthur (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7*, Moody), p. 435

use will be used against us. The measurement we use will be measured right back at us.

It's been my observation that the world loves this verse. Any time someone feels threatened by some moral observation this verse seems to materialize. I have to admit, I kind of like it myself. But is Jesus saying that we are to draw no moral determinations (the Greek word for judge (*krino*) means to make a determination) regarding the behavior other people whatsoever?

Proper Judgments

If Jesus is teaching that we should make no judgments whatsoever, how are we to make a determination regarding verse six (the dogs and swine)? How are we to obey Christ's admonitions regarding church discipline (Matthew 18:15-17)? How are we to obey Paul's admonition of removing ourselves from fellowship with the disobedient (Ephesians 5:7)? How are we to restore an erring brother (Galatians 6:1) if we don't make some judgment regarding the behavior of others?

The very passage we are examining doesn't exclude addressing the behavior of others; once the plank is removed "**from your own eye. . . then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**" Speck removal is a critical job in the life of Christians. The problem is not speck removal; the problem appears to be speck removal by someone has a redwood stuck in their eye-socket. The problem seems to be the character of the person judging and the type judgment or measurement used.

One question this passage forces us to ask is 'Am I willing to have determinations/judgments made about me in the same manner I am making toward others?' The answer should be 'Yes'. Judgment is not necessarily a bad thing. Coaches make judgments regarding the style and techniques of their players. Doctors make judgments regarding our physical health. Psychologists make judgments regarding psychological health. Christians should welcome judgments made regarding their own conduct.

He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. ⁸ Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. (Proverbs 9:7, 8)

So certain judgments are good judgments, and we should have the courage to exercise those judgments toward others and receive them with

love. I am very impressed when someone is capable of properly giving or receiving a correction; sadly, I have found this to be a rare quality.

Improper Judgments

What, then, is the type of judgment to be avoided? The term *hypocrite* in verse five is helpful in figuring this out. The plank/speck comparison is not a big sin versus a little sin. The plank appears to indicate the hypocrisy of the one making the judgment. And the context of the gospels would place the cross-hairs of this admonition squarely in the chest of the Pharisee (religious leaders) who were confident in their own righteousness and despised others (Luke 18:9).

If loving determinations and corrections regarding the behavior of other is to be pursued, the haughty looks (Proverbs 6:17) and smug judgments grounded in one's contentment with their own moral and spiritual excellence is to be avoided. These types of judgments would be akin to surgery performed by a layman with a blindfold, or psychological evaluations determined by a madman.

Two Kingdoms, Two Judgments

God offers us two types of judgment. There is the judgment of loving correction. This is the loving correction God administers toward us (Hebrews 11:5, 6), and it the kind of loving judgment we are to administer toward one another (Galatians 6:1). These judgments are hard to give and hard to receive, but they are good and redemptive. There is no condemnation in these judgments and they are not made by the self-evaluated lofty and supercilious.

The other judgment is made by those who view themselves as qualified arbiters by virtue of their own grandeur. They do not know Christ and do not view themselves as being in need of His mercy. Their judgments are not redemptive and the judgment they receive will not be redemptive either.

In what arena of judgment will you reside, the arena of justice or mercy?

**For _judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown
_no __mercy. _Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:13)**

When, by the grace of God, one begins to appreciate their debt to God (Romans 6:23), they, to the praise of God, lose confidence to judge

from a disposition of superiority. And the world, which is so quick to quote this verse, must take heed—their disdain for an ethically sensitive church is its own form of judgment, and this judgment is almost always rooted in a sense of self-contentment. In other words, the world has its own planks to deal with.

There is the kingdom of this world—a kingdom of darkness (Ephesians 2:2)—and there is the kingdom of God. If the plank of unbelief is not removed and one remains in the kingdom of this world, their judgments will be harsh—both coming and going.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of mercy. There is no room in this kingdom for those who are so content with their own spiritual supremacy that they remain comfortable in the condescending judgments of others. When we hand the communion tray to our neighbor, let us remember that it didn't generate from us but was first handed to us.

Protect the Holy

Jesus ends this portion of the sermon with words that almost don't seem to fit.

Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. (Matthew 7:6)

Since the context is correction of behavior, this could mean that we should not waste our time correcting those who have no desire for correction. As we read earlier, **“Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you. . .” (Proverbs 9:8)**

In a wider sense it could be referring to anything of a godly nature. It could be continually sharing the gospel with a cynic or giving an apologetic to a skeptic. The prophets were torn to pieces (Acts 7:52) and the blood of Christ was trampled under foot (Hebrews 10:29). In light of this, the consecrated communion elements clearly fall into this category.

We all make judgments—every last single one of us. A wise judgment might be to judge oneself. As Paul writes,

Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you. . . ? (2 Corinthians 13:5a)

The plank is removed from our eyes when, by the grace of God, we trust in Christ.

Questions for Study

1. Discuss God's disposition toward a false witness (page 2)?
2. What are some things we are instructed not to do in the Sermon on the Mount (pages 2)?
3. Should Christians never judge at all? Explain (page 3).
4. How can judgment be a good thing (pages 3, 4)?
5. When do judgments become a bad thing (page 4)?
6. Discuss how the two kinds of judgments relate to the two kinds of kingdoms (pages 4, 5).
7. How can one avoid casting pearls before swine (pages 5, 6)?
8. In what respect should a person judge himself (page 6)?

