

Judge Not
Matthew 7:1-6

Turn to Matthew 7 please. Jesus in these verses speaks about what we do when a believer does something wrong. How do we act when they do wrong? Maybe they hurt me, or sinned against me in some way. Maybe they did not do it to me at all, but still, they are doing something that a follower of Jesus has no business doing.

Jesus probably also has in mind how we act when non-believers do these things, but he mentions "brother or sister" in v3, v4, and in v5, so that's the main context. How do we respond when another believer sins?

The Sermon the Mount takes up three chapters of Matthew, Matthew 5 - 7. Matthew 5 is about our relationships with people, Matthew 6 about our relationship God, and Matthew 7 back to relationships with people.

So Matthew 6 at the center teaches about our relationship to our Father in heaven. And at the center of Matthew 6 is the Lord's Prayer. That prayer is the diamond at the center, a short prayer where we ask the Father to do in us what Jesus teaches us to do.

Now, to our text.

Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. (Mt 7:1)

Everybody is going to be judged, according to the Bible, and Jesus is not changing that. As we keep reading, it gets clearer that Jesus means something closer to "condemn." Do not condemn people, that way *you* will not be condemned.

The fifth beatitude said, "blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." Here Jesus comes back to that. "blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Woe to those who are not merciful, for they won't receive mercy. Don't condemn, so you won't be condemned. Woe to those who condemn, for they will be condemned.

All of a sudden this feels pretty close to home. What goes on in my heart when I see people living in ways that I am sure are wrong? What kind of indignation do I feed in my mind, what kind of frustration and attack do I nurture against them? Would I like to be condemned by God in that way? No, not at all!

You will be judged as you judge others (7:2)

For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and the way you measure it out to others, it will be measured to you.

There is a Judge. We know that, Jesus knew that, the people listening to Jesus knew that. And the Judge is watching me handle the sins of others to decide how he will deal with my sins. Folks, that's not good for me. I don't know what my best side is, but this isn't it.

Years ago I read a journal article on the Gospels, written by some obscure Scandinavian NT scholar, and they have some fine ones, and he said, "the kingdom of God is above all a kingdom of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the center of the kingdom. God forgives us, and we forgive each other. That is the main feature of the kingdom of God."

I don't know if that is right, but it is pretty close. I am so happy that the poor in spirit receive the kingdom, the spiritually desperate receive the kingdom, the spiritual losers. But receiving the kingdom means that I will show the same kindness to others that God showed to me. And that's difficult.

Jesus is clear. How I judge, I will be judged. How I measure it out, it will be measured to me. I think about my angry self-righteous energy against those who offend my sense of what is right. You think about your angry self-righteous energy against those who cross your sense of what is right.

And then, we must imagine God having just the same attitude toward us. That's very bad, isn't it? Jesus says no less. *For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and the way you measure it out to others, it will be measured to you.*

We do have to evaluate others. We cannot just say "everyone can do what they want, I will ignore it all, just be good to everyone." Jesus does not want that. Just a few verses later, Jesus will say, "Watch out for false prophets," and then Jesus tells us what to look for, to tell if a prophet is a false prophet, a fierce wolf. We must evaluate others.

In Matt 18 Jesus will tell us that if a brother or sister sins, we should go speak to them about it. So we don't get to turn a blind eye. But we always look at others as those who ourselves have received great undeserved kindness from God.

The Plank and the Sawdust – 7:3-5

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye.

Jesus paints a wonderful ridiculous picture for us: someone has a plank stuck in their eye, a big board, stuck in their eye, and they want to help someone else get a bit of sawdust out of *their* eye!

In this story, the sawdust in our brother or sister's eye is sin, some kind of failure that they need help with. And the plank in my eye is a critical condemning attitude, that angry self-righteous energy and indignation. We're no good to our brother or sister that way.

If you got a piece of sawdust in your eye, you would probably find a mirror, and get real close to the mirror, and try to get the piece of sawdust out of your eye yourself. In the ancient world they had mirrors, but they were not clear enough that you could get a little piece of wood out of your eye.

So you would trust your eye to your family member or friend, and ask your family member or friend to try carefully to take this speck of wood out of your eye.

If your family member was full of angry indignation against you, because you had a speck of wood in your eye, would you want that person trying to take that sawdust out? No. That angry righteous indignation **is** the plank, brothers and sisters.

The sin we see may be as bad as we think it is. Often it is not, but sometimes it is. Let's say it is a real problem. Then think, "how would I like someone to take sawdust out of my eye? I would like them to be very gentle, and careful not to hurt me."

Jesus calls the one with a plank a hypocrite, an actor. We pretend we want to help, we pretend we want to take trouble out of their eyes. But mostly we want them to suffer for their wrongs, we hope to bring some righteously painful consequences, and I want them to see how righteous I am.

This example of Jesus shows the huge problem of the one with the plank. So suppose I have a critical spirit, and have angry condemning words toward someone because of what they are doing wrong.

Jesus says to me, "You think *they* have sin, Ed? You think *they* are doing something wrong? Their sin is sawdust, Ed, and your sin is a plank. Your critical condemning spirit is a far greater problem than what you see in them. Your judging energy is such a big problem that you cannot see anything clearly yourself." That's what Jesus says.

The thing is, the person with the sawdust in their eye really does need help with the sawdust. The people who are sinning do need help. We do them no favour by ignoring this. In our society it is not acceptable to go tell other people about their faults, but people with sawdust in their eye do need help.

When I am sinning and stuck in sin, I would like God to kindly and gently help me out of my sin. That's what I would like God to do. So if a brother or sister is living in a way that offends us, let's think about someone else taking sawdust out of our eye. Let's think how we would like God to come toward us in our sin.

Jesus said, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. The plank is the opposite of righteousness, and the opposite of mercy.

Pearls and Pigs (7:6)

Do not give dogs what is holy; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

I have read different commentaries on Matthew, and all of them were quite lost about this verse. They all had suggestions, and all different.

Verse 5 ends with: *and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother or sister's eye.* And then we have, *Do not give dogs what is sacred*, and so on.

The holy thing, the pearl, is your help in getting the sawdust out of your brother or sister's eye. I think that Jesus is using picturesque language to describe people who have no interest in the kingdom of God. Jesus used strong language here, but he does that once in a while.

Some have sawdust in their eyes, says Jesus, but don't bother! If you try to take the sawdust out of their eye, they'll trample on your help and then they'll turn on you. They are not interested in your help, and they will attack you. Walk away.

In Matt 18, Jesus said that if a brother or sister will not turn from their sin, treat them like they are not a part of the church. Don't try to help a person with the sawdust in their eye, when the person is not interested in first seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Summary

Jesus gives us two reasons to be gentle instead of harsh with brothers and sisters, to help them rather than condemn them, to be kind toward them in their sin, instead of angry at them because of their sin.

First, he says that the way we treat others in their sin is how God will treat us in our sin.

Second, he says until we get rid of the hard angry kind of judging, we are no good to them at all. Our hard angry kind of judging is much worse, as far as Jesus is concerned, than what we think is wrong with them.

Good news from God for the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Good news from God for those who hunger & thirst for righteousness, they will be filled.
Good news from God for the merciful, they will receive mercy. Amen.

PRAYER: O Father, I need your help here. It turns out I am still very poor in spirit. Father, I want to be merciful, I want your kind of righteousness, I want to be pure in heart. We want to be rid of the plank, Father, we all want to be rid of the plank. We want to be as kind to one another as you've been with us. We fall far short on this.

But Father, our Lord's very next words are, "ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the narrow gate will be opened, everyone who asks receives, everyone who seeks finds, for everyone who knocks the gate is opened." We want to be merciful, we want your kind of righteousness, give us hunger for that, and we want to be pure in heart.

And Father, sometimes we get this right. Sometimes we are merciful, sometimes the plank is gone, sometimes we do this well. For all of those we thank you. May it grow among us. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.