

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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DO NOT JUDGE LEST YOU BE JUDGED

Matthew 7:1-5

Matthew 7 could be rightly called 'The Christians' relationships' because it deals with various types of people with whom the Christian is related. It begins with his relationship to the brother. Today we will study the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 7:1-5. This is what we read.

Matthew 7:1. "Do not judge lest you be judged.

2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

3 "And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?

5 "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.

Prohibition against criticism

Don't judge. This is a very well-known command. If you have heard about the Sermon on the Mount, you know that phrase. What does Jesus mean by judging someone? The Greek word 'to judge,' *kreeeno*, embraces a wide range of meanings. It literally means 'to separate' in the sense of sifting. It is also used to express a preference. It is found in the NT as a legal and semi-legal term with complex meanings related to the judicial sphere. It is the context that determines the exact meaning of this word.

The context of Matthew 7 argues that the command 'don't judge' means 'do not be judgmental.' Do not have a critical spirit, a condemning attitude. It should be understood in the sense of passing judgment on somebody. This is clearly expressed in Romans 2:1: *Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.* Here we find that 'judging another' is the same thing as 'passing judgment' on a person.

The Lord Jesus is referring to the judgmental attitude that focuses on others' faults and seeks to tear them down. This kind of person is negative and destructive in his attitude. He enjoys seeking other people's sins but at the same time he has no desire to help them. In fact, this judging as it is used here in Matthew, this condemning, is exactly the opposite of saving. Jesus said in John 12:47, *I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.* 'To judge' and 'to save' have opposite meaning. When

we are judging a person with a condemning attitude, we are not concerned to save him, to build him up.

Not a suspension of our discernment

Now let us be clear about this. When Jesus says, 'Don't judge,' He is not asking us to surrender the judgment of discernment. The judgment that we are asked to surrender is the judgment of condemnation. It is not a suspension of our critical faculties. We are not to turn a blind eye on sin and pretend it is not there when it is actually destroying the church.

The use of our critical faculties to discern between truth and falsehood, or goodness and evil, is frequently required in the Bible. Actually, this very command not to judge others is followed immediately by two other commands that cannot be obeyed without using careful discrimination. In v. 6, we have the command to avoid giving what is holy to dogs and pearls to pigs, and in v. 15, we are told to beware of false prophets. The Lord Jesus demands that we recognize the dogs, the pigs, and the false prophets. Obviously these commands require that we use our critical judgment.

Be subject one to another

There is a tendency in human nature to judge and to criticize. We like to think ourselves better than the rest of the society. Criticizing other people makes us feel good. Don't you agree? Criticism boosts our own self-image because when we gossip about other people's failures, it makes us feel that our own lives are better than the person who failed. It shows how strong we are because of course, we don't do this kind of things. We are better than that, at least in our own eyes.

The Bible teaches a totally different kind of attitude. As Christians, we must learn to be subject to one another, and not to behave as though we were superior to the other person. That is what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples in John 13 when He washed their feet. 'What I have done to you, you must do to one another.' Washing a person's feet was the work of a slave. Jesus is calling us to serve one another. In Philippians 2:3 and Ephesians 5:21, Paul repeats the same teaching. 'Be subject to one another. Don't regard yourself as more important than other people.' Don't try to be the other person's boss. Just be his servant.

There is a lesson that you learn more and more when you walk with God. The Lord Jesus said, 'Don't assess a person's importance according to what he or she is in the world. Greatness in the kingdom of God is very different from what is found in the world. If you want to be the greatest of all, then you have to become the least of everybody. Learn to become the servant of all.' If you want to be great in God's eyes, you must become little and be the last among the brethren. The more you are something in your own eyes, the less significant you are in God's eyes.

This attitude of condemnation can lead to much contention and division in the church. In Galatians 5:15, Paul warns the Galatians in these terms. *But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!* To bite and to devour one another, that is another way to speak about criticism. The spirit of criticism is something that will gradually destroy the church. Paul's warning is about the Galatians criticizing one another. If you bite and devour, i.e., if you criticize, if you eat one another, you are going to be eaten up by one another. And at the end, there will be nothing left. If you want to avoid that, don't criticize. Don't be malicious. If you don't agree with someone, go and talk it over with him in private. You don't have to broadcast to the whole church that somebody's opinion is wrong. Even if your assessment is right, that is not a justification for demeaning a person.

Who are you to judge?

To judge is the prerogative, i.e., the power, the privilege of a ruler. The judge represents the people who are in authority over you. If you do anything wrong, or if there is a quarrel between two people, the matter is taken to the higher authority in order to deal with the problem. And the judge represents the higher authority.

When we judge a person, passing a sentence upon him, we are putting ourselves above that person. We are saying that we are worthy and we have the right to be the judge over his life. This is a role that we are not allowed to have. When we sit in judgment upon somebody else, we are claiming a competence and an authority that is not ours. Since when have I been his lord and his judge that I have the power to pass judgment upon him? Since when has he been my servant, responsible to me? Paul applied the truth of Matthew 7:1 to the Romans in Romans 14:4: *Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.* Paul is saying, 'He is not responsible to you. Who are you to claim the right to sit in judgment upon him as if he was responsible to you for his behavior? You are not his judge. You are not his lord.'

It is true that some have been called to be judges in the legal courts of their country. But what we want to highlight here is that no one can pass a final moral judgment upon his fellow men. Only God can do that through Christ on the day of judgment. Paul understood that very well. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:4-5, *For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore **do not go on passing judgment before the time**, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.* The point that Paul is making is that man is not God. No man is qualified to be the judge of his fellow men because we cannot read other people's hearts nor can we assess their motives. And we rarely know all the facts behind a situation. So the conclusion is this. Don't judge. Don't take the role of the Divine Judge. Don't try to play God.

We reap what we sow

There is a danger to which we expose ourselves if we start judging people: we will be among those who will be judged. And we will be judged according to the measure we dared to judge others. *For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.* The criticizer will be judged by the law of equal weight, i.e., you will be judged by the same rule which you apply to others. This reciprocal principle expresses the biblical notion that you reap what you sow. The word of God makes mention of it in several places. Here are some examples.

Galatians 6:7. ...For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

2Corinthians 9:6. ...He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Matthew 5:7. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

James 2:13. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy...

Job 4:8. Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

Proverbs 22:8. He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow, and the rod of his anger will fail.

This principle of receiving back what you gave is true of men and of God. It refers no less to the way in which men will judge us than to the rule by which God will judge. A person with a critical spirit is inviting a lot of harsh words on himself from others. It is expected that he will receive the same criticism he dispenses. It is also true that God will treat us in the same way that we treat others. Those who judge will find themselves judged by God. That is what happened to king David when he stole another man's wife.

The judgment of David

This incident is given to us in 2Samuel 12. David lusted after this woman, and later discovered that she had become pregnant by him. Her husband was away, fighting the king's wars. So David arranged to have him killed during a battle. David is now guilty of both adultery and murder, two offences punishable by death (Exodus 21:12; Leviticus 20:10).

However, it would not have been easy to apply it to David. In terms of human law, he could get away with it. I think of some of our court cases and how they are debated. If David had a lawyer, I can easily imagine him defending his client's case on the basis that David was a king. Now, the fact that David was a king does not protect him from being punished with death when the law requires it. But as a king, he was the commander in chief of the army. And this woman's husband was an officer in his army. David had every right to send any of his officers anywhere he wanted them to be. And he sent Uriah to the front line, putting him in the most dangerous spot in the battle. As a result, he was killed in action. Did David do anything illegal? No. He was in his rights to do what he did. Under human law, he had done nothing wrong. And then of course, since the woman's husband was dead, he was free to marry her. There is nothing wrong to marry a woman whose husband is dead.

You see, motives are much harder to prove than facts. You may be able to prove that David was the one who gave the order to put Uriah in the front line. But it is almost impossible to demonstrate that this action was motivated by the intention to have him killed so that David could marry Uriah's wife. That is the weakness of the human court. But you can't fool God. God's eyes were upon David's heart and He saw his sin. God saw the reason why David did all this. Then a servant of God, by the name of Nathan, came to speak to David.

'I want to tell you, your majesty, about a certain case. Here is the story. There was a man who had one ewe lamb. This young lamb was very precious because that's the only one he had. It was like a daughter to him. He would carry this lamb in his bosom. And there came this wealthy man with many sheep. But he wanted this ewe lamb from the poor man. So he took by force this ewe lamb from the poor man.'

When David heard this story, he became very angry. What injustice for this man with so many sheep to take this poor man's one lamb! He said, 'I pronounce that he must pay back fourfold.' In other words, if he has taken one lamb, he will have to give back the poor man four lambs. Nathan looked at David and his reply came as a bombshell. He said, 'You are the man.'

What happened? By this parable, Nathan drew from David a sentence against himself. When David declared that the rich man must restore the lamb fourfold, he was actually pronouncing a judgment on himself. 'You are the rich man who stole the ewe lamb,' Nathan said. The lamb that David had taken was Bathsheba, the wife of this officer. And the Lord carried out the sentence exactly as David had pronounced it. Consequently, David lost four sons. They died one after the other. His child born in adultery with Bathsheba died (2Samuel 12:15). Then Amnon was killed (2Samuel 13:28-29). And then, Absalom was killed too (2Samuel 18:14-15). And finally, Adonijah was also put to death (1Kings 2:24-25). Out of his own mouth, David was judged by God according to his own view of what justice demanded. The ruler that you use on others will be used on you.

Don't be a hypocrite

It is interesting to observe that David was so quick to condemn the rich man in Nathan's story, but he was so fatally blind to his own sins. He could see the speck of sawdust in the rich man's eye but he was not aware of the log that was sticking out of his own eye, living without any true sense of his sins.

The Lord Jesus says, *And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?* There is a comical element in this aspect of the Lord's teaching here. How is it that you seem so capable of seeing a speck in somebody else's eye, but you are not able to see the big beam sticking out of your own eye? Jesus likes to use hyperboles to drive home a lesson. The speck and the beam are figures for personal faults that need correction. And the question is this: why is the criticizer so concerned about other people's small fault, when he has major unresolved problems to face?

You know, it is terribly easy to be just like that, to focus on the imperfections of others while remaining undisturbed by our own shortcomings. This is almost a law of life. Every human being has this great tendency to undervalue the size of his own faults and to overvalue the size of others. And very often, it is not so much our assessment of others that is perverted, but our assessment of ourselves. In Proverbs 21:2, we read, *Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.* This 'critical law of gravity' constantly inclines us to judge everything in our own favor.

Judge yourself

The Lord Jesus tells us to do the exact opposite. *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.* Before you think about being critical of others, first be critical of yourself. Don't try to put right the problems of others if you have not dealt with your own problems first.

Notice that the Lord Jesus does not tell us never to deal with other people's problems. Indeed He invites us to help others, but not before we take care of the major problems in our life. It is not hard to understand that if you are able to take care of your own problems, then you are better placed to deal sensitively with someone else's problem. The person who examines himself and works through his own problems will be able to see more clearly. He can then remove the speck from his brother's eye. We can also understand the Lord's teaching here in this way: those who are ready to aid others are those who have learned to deal with their own faults.

In conclusion, the command 'judge not' is not a requirement to be blind. It turns out that Jesus asks us to be self-critical. In the course of His teaching, 'judge not' has become 'judge yourselves.'