



Judge Not

Text: Matthew 7:1-6

Care and Missions Pastor Dan Slagle

1. What are the first things you notice when you meet someone?
 - a. What are things that initially lead you to like or dislike someone?
 - b. When was a time you made a snap judgment about someone and came to realize later that the “box” you had put that person in was not true at all? How was your thinking about that person challenged and ultimately changed?
2. Read Matthew 7:1-6.
 - a. Dan said that we often misuse the words in Matthew 7:1 as a shield to protect against unwanted criticism and evaluation. How have you seen this in your life? What is your instinctive response to criticism?
 - b. What is the difference between judging, as Jesus condemns it here, and wise discernment?
 - c. Dan said that when we judge someone’s worth we take the place of God, breaking the first commandment. How does this change your perspective of judging others?
 - d. Why can judging someone and loving someone not coexist?
3. Read Luke 7:36-50.
 - a. How did Jesus act towards the “sinners” he encountered?
 - b. How did he act towards the people who were judging those “sinners”?
4. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Hebrews 4:12.
 - a. Why are critical self-examination and peering at ourselves through the lens of God’s Word essential if we are to break free from the ugly instinct of judging?
 - b. How are you intentionally making room in your life for God’s Word and the Holy Spirit to speak to you?
 - c. What was the most recent way you were rebuked and corrected by God’s Word?

Challenge: Because he lives, we can be free from our old, sinful ways. We can be free from putting ourselves in the place of God. We can be free from the weight of guilt and shame and condemnation for our failures and extend graces to others as well. Dan challenged us at the end to reflect on why it is so glorious that He lives. What does Jesus life, death, and resurrection mean for you, personally and specifically in the season of life you are in right now? Complete this sentence: Because he lives ...

Meditate on God’s grace and love in Christ and as you do, extend that grace and love to others.

Prayer:

Lord, you are merciful. You provide grace and mercy in spite of behavior and in spite of sins. You are a good Father that comes to those that need you, no matter what. We are not perfect. Our sins are not hidden from you. And you love us despite our human nature. Lord, we need you today to provide. To change our hearts and align it with you. To see people as you see them and to love them as you love them. We need your grace in our life to provide strength because we are weak. Allow our hearts to always be focused on You and make our desire to live for You. Help us see the clear, narrow path in front of us so we can walk in your ways and in your glory.

STUDY DEEPER**Look Up to God, Or Look Down on Others**

I've always been fascinated by the introduction to Jesus's parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector:

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else. . . . (Luke 18:9)

Luke describes Jesus's audience as people who did two things: (1) they trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and (2) they looked down on everyone else. Don't miss the connection between those two descriptions. They go together.

Spiritual short-sightedness leads to a sense of a spiritual superiority. When you trust in yourself that you are righteous, you look down on others. When you look down on others, you feel better about yourself. And on and on the cycle goes, with these two elements reinforcing each other.

Misplaced Trust

A judgmental spirit starts with misplaced trust. We live in a world that prizes the "self-made individual." Trust in yourself. Believe in yourself. Do it yourself. All of these messages encourage us to seek independence and to chart our own course in the world.

Apply that mindset to salvation, however, and you dig your own spiritual grave. The idea that you can work your way up to God, trusting in your own power and your own efforts, may seem noble and even praiseworthy in our world today. But this idea signifies a fundamental lack of self-awareness. The only way you can think you have what it takes to become righteous, that you have what it takes to please God is if you have lowered God's standard to something more attainable or if you have overlooked all the sin that keeps you from making the cut.

Looking In, Looking Down

Take a look at the second aspect of this description. The people who trusted in themselves looked down on everyone else. The crowd that Jesus was addressing had misplaced their trust, which led to a warped sense of the people around them. This lack of self-awareness about your sin is what leads you to a posture of self-righteousness.

Once you lower God down to a standard that is attainable, you no longer compare yourself to him; you compare yourself to others. As long as you feel like you are doing better than the people around you, your sense of superiority grows. Listen to how C. S. Lewis describes this descent into the sin of spiritual superiority:

All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing and spoiling sport, and backbiting; the pleasures of power, of hatred. . . . A cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute.

That's a tough pill to swallow, but it's true. And this text—just the situation that provides the context for Jesus's parable—is enough to show us how self-righteousness and spiritual superiority go together.

Do you see how the pattern of self-righteousness becomes more entrenched? First, you trust in yourself and become self-righteous, which leads you to look down on others. Second, you look down on others, and once you notice their sins, you trust even more in yourself, that you are more righteous than they are. And then you look down even more on others, and so on. The cycle spins out of control until we are blinded by self-righteous posturing.

Gospel Hope

Thankfully, true Christianity smashes the cycle and tears up this pattern. According to the gospel, we are to trust in God alone for our salvation, and we trust in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus's blood and righteousness," the old hymn goes. The gospel cuts to the heart of our tendency to trust in ourselves and in our own righteousness. The gospel also shatters the sense of superiority we may feel toward others.

As long as you are looking up to God for salvation, you can't look down on anyone else. Once you know how much you need the mercy of God, how in the world can you look down your nose on someone else in need of the same mercy?

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/look-god-look-others/>