

Time of Grace Ministry
Out of Context: "Do Not Judge"
Matthew 7:1-6
August 11, 2019

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You know, if I'm looking at my friend or my brother and I'm reading the Bible and the Bible says that, you know, Christians, when it comes to sexuality or sobriety, God has a standard like this that we should measure up to. And I might be absolutely right about that as I read the Bible but I have to know that as soon as I open my mouth and judge someone by this standard, do you know what the very next thing that's going to happen is? They're going to take this measure and set it next to me.

Have you ever felt like you just had to say something? When you witness someone doing something that you know is dangerous; going down a dark, difficult, and sinful path and you know to say something would be complicated and hard and difficult and the person would probably be defensive but something within you just wasn't okay with staying silent. When we see people that we love - our friends, our family, our fellow members at church - doing something that God doesn't like, so often the Christian conscience is burdened with a desire and a compulsion to say something.

And just before we get up the courage to say something, there's these three words from the Bible that often float into our heads; the words that some people think are the most quoted words in all the Scripture in contemporary culture. The words come from Matthew 7 and they say, "Do not judge," which is pretty clear, isn't it? You know who said those words? Jesus. He said, "Don't judge." Who are you as an imperfect, broken, sinful person to look down and correct the behavior of another imperfect, broken, sinful person? And do you know what judging means if you'd look up that word? "To say that something is good or bad." You are a judgmental person if you say that anything is good or bad. So if you see someone being kind and generous with a little kid and you say, "That's great," you're being judgmental. And when someone tweets something that's really sexist or racist and you say, "That's not right," you are being judgmental. If you think that bosses and religious leaders shouldn't abuse the people at their company or in their church, you are being judgmental. When you think that feeding the poor and stopping sex trafficking is a good thing for our planet, you're being judgmental. And the guy who marches around the military funeral with a sign in his hand with something vile about God, he's being judgmental. And if you think it's vile, you also are being judgmental. In fact, this is so important and we miss it so closely, I'd love for you to write this down in your programs; that all people, including you, including me, spend all day being judgmental. And if you don't like that sentence, you are being judgmental. And so when Jesus said, "Do not judge," you know, Christians shouldn't be judgmental, something just doesn't seem right because the fact that Jesus was saying to people, "Don't be like that," was in and of itself a form of being judgmental. Every value judgment, every categorizing of something as good or bad, as holy or sinful, is being judgmental. All people, religious or not, fundamentalist Christians or total atheists, all people on

planet earth spend all day long being judgmental. Jesus had standards; he didn't want people to throw out the whole idea of right or wrong. So what exactly did he mean when he said do not judge? And besides that, aren't some of the biggest problems that we read in the headlines of America today because people weren't judgmental enough? The Hollywood director is a pervert and people on the set know it. But no one steps forward and says that's bad and judges him. No one raises the standard of behavior. And because people weren't judgmental, some poor actress walks into his office for the first time and gets hurt. A pastor, a priest, a business leader, is taking advantage of their position; they're hurting people. They're taking money, they're abusing people sexually, and instead of the people who know saying, "We can't stand for this. We need a higher standard of behavior." No one's judgmental and then what happens?

So many of the American headlines these days are the question, "Who knew?" Like, who in the organization knew about this behavior and didn't do something? Didn't say something? And Americans don't say it this way, but essentially what they're trying to express is why weren't you more judgmental? When you don't call bad things bad, when you don't call sinful things sinful, people get hurt because that's what bad things do; they hurt people. So some people would say, you know, religious people are way too judgmental; they have to stop. While other people would say many of us are not being judgmental enough; we need more of it. So what exactly should we do? And when it's not some Hollywood headline but it's happening in your family or in your workplace or in your church or in your circle of friends, when you see something bad or wrong and you don't want to be like that hypocritical person, you just want to stop bad things from hurting people, what do you say?

So what exactly did Jesus mean with those famous words, "Do not judge?" I have some really good news for you today. Jesus' answer to that question is crystal clear. If you would just keep reading the context, what he meant when he said those words is so simple to understand. And so today, I want to teach you not just a quote but the context. I want to dig in not just to Matthew 7:1(a) but read you the whole paragraph of what Jesus taught. So the next time you see someone you love doing something that God himself does not love, you'll know exactly what to say and how to say it.

So let's jump into Jesus' words here in Matthew 7; he started like this: "Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you," which helps already, doesn't it? When you think about interpreting the Bible or understanding Jesus correctly, you should circle little transition words like the word "for" in the second line. "For" is essentially Jesus' chance to explain himself. I said, "You shouldn't judge" and you can interpret that in a whole bunch of ways. "For" is his way of saying exactly what I meant and you can see what Jesus meant. He's saying, "In the same way you judge those people, those people are going to judge you." The same standard of behavior that you want people to measure up to is the same standard they're going to use when they turn around and measure you. I mean, we could think of it like this - I don't fix things very often so I think this is a tape measure. Does that sound about right? You know, if I'm looking at my friend or my brother and I'm reading the Bible and the Bible says that, you know, that Christians, when it comes to sexuality or sobriety, God has a standard like this that we should measure up to. And I might be absolutely right about that as I read the Bible but I have to know

that as soon as I open my mouth and judge someone by this standard, do you know what the very next thing that's going to happen is? They're going to take this measure and set it next to me. If I'm going to talk about your sense of humor, your work ethic, how you are in relationships, if I'm going to talk to my wife about how much we do around the home and how we approach conversations and I say, you know, "This is what the Bible says; this is right," I have to know that just instinctively she's going to borrow my tape measure and see if I measure up.

You know, Jesus says what you can't do is you can't say, "Here's God's standard," and then when it comes to yourself, have a different standard. You can't say, "The Bible says," but then have a different lifestyle that doesn't measure up to what the Bible says. Jesus said, if that's what you're going to do, like this for other people but just this for yourself, then don't judge or you're going to be judged because every person deep in their heart has that little inner defense lawyer, right, who loves to borrow the tape measure. So before you open your mouth - and you might have to - make sure you know that judgment is coming right back to you. In fact, Jesus says this is so important because if you change the standard of measurement, you won't just lose the chance to correct bad behavior; the conversation will blow up and hurt people in an even worse way.

That's what Jesus goes on to say in the next verses; check out what he says in verse three. He says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?" You know, when Jesus grew up, his stepdad Joseph was a carpenter so Jesus was drawing on an illustration that he just grew up with in his childhood. And he said, "How is it possible that you would look at something so small, like a speck of sawdust, like a little sliver, and you could pay no attention to this massive plank, this two by four, that's literally sticking out of your face? I think Jesus is exaggerating, he's cracking the joke to say how ridiculous would it be to be so concerned about this little thing and so unconcerned about this big thing? Jesus maybe would put it this way. He's like, you know, there's this little sliver of wood - can you see this from the back row? Probably not. And if you saw this like sticking out of someone's eyeball, you would probably be concerned like that's probably not good for you; we should probably take care of that. But he said, you know, sometimes you can see in your neighbor, your brother, your friend, your boss something that's not right, something that's dangerous, and everything in you is just so focused on that that you want to take it out but he says how can you take that out if there's a plank sticking out of your face? Can you just visualize the scene? I mean, if I walked into work and there's my boss like, "Hey! Let me help you with that little sliver over there," it's going to be a dangerous and ridiculous situation.

And notice the language that Jesus uses. He says why do you look at this and pay no attention to this?" Why are you so infatuated with behavior, with correcting this, with seeing the danger and the problem with this little thing but it's like you have no concern, no desire, to change. You don't even pay attention to this big thing.

It kind of reminds me of a famous commercial from 1987; some of you are as old as me so you can remember this. The American Anti-Drug Council ran a commercial in the late 80's that became famous. This dad kind of barges into his teenage son's bedroom; his son is listening to

music and he has a box in his hand filled with drug paraphernalia. Have you seen this? And he says to the kid, "Where did you get this? Your mom found this in the closet. Where did this come from?" And the kid tries to explain and he tries to defend himself but his dad cuts off every sentence and he shouts and he yells until finally he points a finger in his son's face and he says, "Who taught you how to do this?" And the son's response? "You, alright? I learned it from you, dad." And the voiceover comes: "Parents who use drugs have children who use drugs," and the commercial ends, right? It's like the father saw this speck, this dangerous thing, my kid's getting high, we've got to deal with this, but he missed something major in his own life. And Jesus said be very, very careful. If you're going to follow me, if you're going to be my disciple, if you're going to take sin seriously - and you should - be careful that you don't look at this in others and pay no attention to the thing in yourself.

I once heard a pastor say about Jesus' words that very, very often, the speck and the plank are made out of the same wood. Like, sometimes the thing that drives you crazy about your daughter is kind of the same thing that you do. Sometimes the same sin that seems so obvious in others is a sin you often commit yourself. Have you ever been at the park and seen a dad turn to his kids and say, "Stop yelling!" Have you ever seen a husband and a wife in an argument and he says, "You always try to win," as he tries to win with that exaggeration? If you're the proud person in the room and someone else comes in with a lot of pride, you will notice it instantly and you'll hate it. If you're like sinfully over competitive and you always have to win and a version of you walks into the room or onto the field, you're going to notice them and despise them. It's the vain woman who cares way too much about the way that she looks who notices the vanity in another woman at her job. It's the person who has to get the last word in an argument who goes crazy when someone else at work has to get the last word in an argument. The speck and the plank are very often the same thing and it's so clear, we see it, we look at it in other people, but we pay no attention to it in ourselves.

And so Jesus asked the question, "Well, why?" You notice that in verse three? Why do you look at that but pay no attention to this? And I think there are some really good answers to that question. Let me have you write the first one down. Why do we notice the sin in other people? Why are Christians, religious people in particular, so quick to judge? Here's my first answer: We know that other people's sin is dangerous. Like, this little sliver, this speck, might seem small compared to the plank but if this was literally in someone's eye, it would be dangerous. You know, if a piece of a contact, if a little bug, if an eyelash in your eye can do damage and drive you crazy, then even a speck isn't to be taken lightly. And so often, it's the most biblically-minded people, those who are the most passionate about their religion and faith, who see that when other people don't. I get why the world thinks that Christians are very often judgmental because sometimes, it's only the people who are closest to Christ who realize how bad run of the mill, every day sins, really are. Where many people might excuse it and say, well, no one's perfect and everybody sins, we're all broken, we're all messed up, God is love, we're all going to be fine, but it's the Christian who's actually read Jesus' teaching who knows that if you do this and if we don't take this out of your soul, it will cause major damage to you, to other people, and even to your eternity.

I think the Apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6, he said, "Don't be deceived; the sexually immoral, men who have sex with men, slanderers, the greedy, the drunks, if they don't repent, they can't inherit the kingdom of God," which explains why we look at the speck but why do Christians not see the plank? If our knowledge of the Bible makes us take this more seriously than most people, how could it be possible that the most religious people would miss this? I thought about that question a lot this past week and here's the best answer that I have, it's number two, that we think our sin is different. Sometimes the speck and the plank are made out of the same kind of wood but sometimes they're not. And sometimes his behavior or her behavior or our friend's behavior is just so - it's just so confusing to us that it seems like we have to say something. This happens a ton generationally; sometimes the sins we stereotypically struggle with as older people or younger people or, you know, from this generational culture or this one; they're so different that we just spend our time focused on how can those people do that? And so maybe you've heard the stereotypes, right? Older, boomer Christians, they look at millennials and - right? They use that phrase, "millennials," - like their work ethic. How many times are you going to change majors and change jobs and something's going to be hard so you're just going to bail? You have no commitment, you won't join a church, you won't join anything because you have no perseverance or endurance. Have you never read the Bible? That life is hard and you need thicker skin and you've got to toughen up and it's so easy to look at that generation and see its flaws and point a finger. And what do millennials do right back? They look at their parents, their grandparents, and they think, "Yeah, like I'd want to have a faith like yours?" "Mom and dad, you always post that stuff on Facebook about immigrants - do you know that Jesus was an immigrant? That he fled to Egypt? That when God's people came out of the Promise Land, they were immigrants? But man, you just snap judgments about what people should do and political issues?" You didn't get divorced because you were religious but I would never want to have a relationship like yours." "Dad, you said you were providing for us while you were never home and I'm not going to do that to my kids." And one Christian looks at another Christian and the sins seem so different and they notice it in an instant and they can't see something themselves.

But you know, it's not that different. It might seem so different on paper but you know the root problem, the common denominator? We all love to think about sins that we don't commit and we love to ignore the ones that we do. We all love to quote the passages that we're doing pretty well with and want to skip by the pages that convict us and ask us to change. And so, we come to church with selective listening, we have a confirmation bias when it comes to Jesus' teaching, we latch onto these passages and we ignore those ones and people get hurt. You know, I thought about Jesus' analogy. If this was sticking out of your eye but I didn't deal with my own sin, if there is actually a plank sticking out of my face and I try to get this, do you know what's going to happen? I'm going to smack you in the face before I ever get to the speck. Every time I try to talk about this, I'm going to do more damage because my hypocrisy will be so evident to you that you'll never be willing to have the hard conversation about this until we deal with this. Which is exactly why Jesus said before we deal with this, we've got to start here.

Look what he says in verse five of Matthew 7. He says, "You hypocrite. First, take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." I love that. When someone quotes, the Bible says do not be judgmental. Immediately open your

Bible and quote this verse because this is what Jesus actually meant. He said, "Are you concerned about removing that speck from your brother's eye? Do you think that behavior's wrong and sinful and dangerous and needs to be dealt with?" The answer is God does, too! Do you think that person needs to repent and change and get help? The answer is yes; God agrees with you. Are you right about that passage that you quote and measuring behavior? You're probably right, the Bible does say that, but before we have that conversation, we have to have a different conversation. Let me highlight here what Jesus is saying. He's saying, first, deal with you. And then you can deal with them. First we've got to look at the man in the mirror, to quote Michael Jackson. First we've got to ask him to make a change. And then, then we can actually have the conversation without it blowing up in hypocrisy.

See, if you don't do that, Jesus knows exactly what's going to happen. Let me show you the toughest verse in this section, Matthew 7:6. He says, "Do not give dogs what is sacred and do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet and turn and tear you to pieces." Now that honestly is a really difficult verse to interpret. Here's what I think, but I'm not sure about this. I think that the sacred thing, the pearls that Jesus is talking about, is this book. Now I'm about to have a conversation with you about your behavior and I'm going to open this book and share this sacred word of God, this precious pearl that Jesus has given to us, but if I do it as a hypocrite, if I have a plank in my face and I'm bringing the Bible, you know what's going to happen? You're going to trample this under your feet. You're not going to listen to me or respect the Bible or be so grateful that I quoted that passage. Instead, you're going to trample the word, despise when someone quotes it to you, and then you're going to turn and tear me to pieces. The sacred word of God will be damaged; our relationship will be damaged because I didn't start with this. Instead, I just wanted to talk about this. But if I deal with this first, if I come to you humbly, if I admit my sin, if I'm not coming as a hypocrite but as a fellow sinner who relies on the grace of God, then maybe, just maybe, we can talk about this.

So put it all together in context and what exactly is Jesus teaching? Here's what I think, if you're taking notes. In context, Jesus said do not judge - yet. There's a time when you need to judge; we're going to have to talk about bad behavior and correct sins. But before you have that conversation, just wait. You can judge but just not yet.

So before I say "Amen," let's answer one final question: How? If we're going to start with ourselves, if we're going to deal with this plank, how can we do that? If it's so easy to be blind to our own sins and not see it, how can we learn to see it? Let me give you three quick answers to that question. The first one is to grow by reading the Bible. If you would actually read the Bible, cover to cover, and not just do that like kind of weird, mysterious, spiritual, "Let's just open to this page and point," there's my devotion for the day, but you actually read paragraphs and chapters and books, God's going to deal with your plank. Even more powerful, number two, is to gather. Unless your health impedes you, if you can gather with a church family - because do you know what I do every time before I get up here to speak to you? I think about you. I think about our conversations, I think about our emails, I think about our texts, as I'm writing a message, I'm going through the church directory and thinking about you, your family, your story. I'm trying to connect the dots between the things that maybe you see and the things that maybe you don't that I've seen in you. But the best thing of all - even better than reading the Bible and

coming to church - here's my favorite: It's the group. It's to gather with other Christians and to be able to ask one of the most dangerous and helpful questions of all: What don't I see?

Brothers and sisters, if you do those three things, it won't make the conversation easy but it will make it better. Because if you deal with your own sins and your own plank, do you know what's going to happen? You're going to be really, really, thankful for Jesus. Every time I speak to you, I'm always looking at the section of Scripture for the good news. Like, where's the hope? People don't just come to church to get Bible-slapped Sunday after Sunday; you wouldn't come back. So where's the grace and the forgiveness and the compassion? To be honest, you know, I read Matthew 7:1-6 a dozen times and it's not there. There's just no warm, fuzzy ending. But then I thought, why did Jesus say it? Because he didn't want his followers to be self-righteous and proud. He wanted them to be able to see their own sin and follow him to a cross. And if you do the same thing, if the Holy Spirit and a good Christian community helps you see that your sin is this substantial and this crazy and yet, there is a God who took care of all of it, that there is a Jesus who didn't have a splinter, a speck, or a plank but he had a cross made of wood and he died on it for the forgiveness of all of our pride and judgmentalism and sin. When we kneel every morning at the foot of the cross and we say, "God, you had mercy on me. When I was ignorant, when I was too zealous, when I was too proud, you were so patient with me, so loving." And if every day, you can start as just a humble sinner who's been forgiven by the love of God, you'll be ready to have a hard conversation.

Let's pray.

Dear Jesus, we care so much about the sins that we see and we know that you do, too. When we see parents who discipline their kids out of anger, we want to say something for the sake of the kids and the family. When we see stuff at our workplace and in our church, we want to say something that there would be more love and more compassion and more unity and so we need so much of your help. And it's so easy to think that for other people, sin should be like a light switch; that we should have one conversation and they just stop. But we know ourselves way too well to expect that. And so I pray, God, for the kind of compassion that we need to have these conversations. We cannot love people if we avoid telling them about the path they're going down but we can't be loving to people if we don't start with ourselves.

And so I pray specifically today, God, that you would give us community; that we could live in those honest and transparent environments where people could talk to us about our sin because we've asked them to. God, I pray especially for our church and a community that is so increasingly anti-religious, that labels people like us as hypocrites, maybe sometimes we deserve it. So I pray, God, that you would cure us of our hypocrisy. Help us not to pretend to care about sin just in other people but not in ourselves. And more than anything, Father, I pray for your mercy and your grace. It is so incredible to be able to confess the bad things that we've done and hear the good news of Jesus' love. And so I pray that that would captivate our hearts; that we would know what Jesus taught in context. That we could deal with sin among us and we could know the joy of following you in full obedience. Help us to be those kind of people and help us to be that kind of church. Jesus, we pray all this in your beautiful name, Amen.



TIME OF GRACE®

Out of Context: "Do Not Judge"

Study Notes

Summary

Some have said that Jesus' words about judging are the most famous in modern America, surpassing even John 3:16. Jesus did indeed say, "Judge not!" but make sure to read the context. Jesus was not against being judgmental. Yet he was very against the hypocrisy of many judgmental people who overlook their own flaws in a zealous attempt to point out the flaws of others. His words, clearly understood, encourage us to look in the mirror first and judge others in love afterward.

- **Matthew 7:1:** Stop judging.
- All people spend all day being _____.
- **Matthew 7:1-2:** ¹Stop judging so that you will not be judged. ²Otherwise, you will be judged by the same standard you use to judge others. The standards you use for others will be applied to you.
- **Matthew 7:3,4:** ³So why do you see the piece of sawdust in another believer's eye and not notice the wooden beam in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to another believer, "Let me take the piece of sawdust out of your eye," when you have a beam in your own eye?
- Why are Christians quick to judge?
 1. We know their sin is _____.
 2. We think our sin is _____.
- **Matthew 7:5:** You hypocrite! First remove the beam from your own eye. Then you will see clearly to remove the piece of sawdust from another believer's eye.
- **Matthew 7:6:** Don't give what is holy to dogs or throw your pearls to pigs. Otherwise, they will trample them and then tear you to pieces.
- In context, Jesus said, "Do not judge . . . _____!"
- How?
 1. _____ (the Bible)

2. _____ (church)
3. _____ (other Christians)

Points to Ponder

1. Some people, like the Pharisees, are very quick to judge the behavior of fellow Christians. Others, like the Corinthians (refer to 1 Corinthians 5), never judge anyone's behavior. Which temptation is greater for you? Why do you suppose you judge so quickly or not at all?

2. Think of a time that someone confronted you for your behavior. Did they approach you in the way Jesus describes in Matthew chapter 7? What could have made the conversation more effective?

3. **Evaluate:** The key to judging Jesus' way is to realize that God has had mercy on you, a sinner.

Homework for Next Week

Read Matthew 18:15-20.

*"Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking.
The way to trouble God is not to come at all."
—D. L. Moody*