

Do not judge

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A sermon preached at Poplar Baptist Church at the morning service on 12th September 2004, by Henry Dixon.

"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."
(Matthew 7.1 – 2)

Introduction

Jesus' command "Do not judge" is a very important command, which cuts right across the grain of how all of us naturally tend to think and speak.

In what follows there are four questions I want to seek to answer:

What did Jesus mean when he said "Do not judge"
What are the situations where we tend to judge others?
What happens to us if we judge others?
What truths will help us not to judge others?

1. What did Jesus mean when he said "do not judge"?

Let me first of all say what Jesus did not mean. He did not mean, have no opinions; suspend your judgement on all matters; if anyone asks for an opinion on a subject say weakly "I don't know."

How do we know this? Because just a few verses later in the same chapter of Matthew's Gospel (chapter 7), in verses 6 – 8, Jesus says "Do not throw to dogs what is sacred and do not throw to your pearls before pigs. If you do they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces." There are certain individuals who will mistreat private and personal information that you share with them, who will twist what you say and turn it against you. So you need to be able to discern which individuals are the sort of people who will misuse information that you disclose to them.

Then a few verses further on Jesus says, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognise them." We need to be discerning. We need to know who are false teachers. We need to make wise judgements based upon the fruit in their lives.

So Jesus is not saying that we should be bland spineless jellyfish with no opinions or convictions about anything. What is he saying then? That when we become aware of what we consider to be the sins and shortcomings of others, we should not condemn them in our hearts, or consider ourselves morally superior to them.

Our natural tendency is to latch onto the faults and failings of others, and to concentrate on them, and to use these failings as an excuse for us to despise the individuals in our hearts. At the bottom level it boils down to pride. We love to boost our opinions of ourselves by putting others down.

2. What are the situations where we tend to judge others?

What are the times when we tend to judge others? Let me mention a few.

First of all, when we become aware of others who have sinned in very obvious and gross ways. The alcoholic lying in the gutter; the drug addict who lies, cheats and steals in order to feed his habit; the child abuser who steals children's innocence, the serial adulterer who has one affair after another; the practicing homosexual who parades in the street boasting about his wrong behaviour; the murderer who shows no respect for human life: all of these we can very easily think of as "beasts" and not worthy of any human love or respect.

There is no doubt about it. These are very serious and grave sins which the Bible roundly condemns. They are a great offence against God, and cause untold harm to others. We are not to water down our Biblical convictions about these sins in the name of love. But neither should we entertain in our hearts a spirit of judgment and condemnation towards those who have committed these sins.

Another time when we might be tempted to judge others is when we see others acting in a foolish way, such as the person who drives in a dangerous way; the person who wastes his money and gets into debt; the person who fritters his time away in foolish pursuits; or the person who is disorganised and always late and missing appointments.

Again, if you have learned to drive sensibly, and to organise your time and money well, then this is good and right. It is not good that we should be slipshod and lazy in the way we organise our lives. But if we judge and condemn in our hearts, and perhaps in our speech as well, others who have not learned these skills, we are sinning.

We also might be tempted to judge children when we see them misbehaving. For us who are adults we can find it very easy in certain situations to be judgemental towards children, whether our own or other people's, when we see them

misbehaving. If we see them being destructive, or lazy, or rude, or defiant, we can very easily get onto our high horse and be condemning and judgemental towards them, and despise them in our hearts. We tend very easily to say things like "I can't imagine how you could do such a thing." We condemn them and put them down.

This does not mean that we should have no opinions about such behaviour. Disobedient and defiant behaviour in a child is very wrong, and shows disrespect towards God. Such wrong behaviour needs to be corrected. If the parents of a child who is misbehaving are unaware of the misbehaviour of their child, or have failed to act when they are aware, they need to have the behaviour of their child lovingly pointed out to them, and they need to be reminded of their duty to correct the child. But if we entertain in our heart a judgemental attitude towards that child, then we are ourselves sinning, perhaps in a worse way than the child has sinned.

For those who are Christians, there is also a temptation to judge fellow Christians whom we feel are weaker than ourselves, such as the person who misses meetings; the person who is not, in your view, committed to outreach in the way you are; the person whom you suspect is not giving as sacrificially as you are; the person whom you think does not help with practical tasks as much as you do; the person whose understanding of certain Biblical truths is, in your view, defective; or the person who is, as you see it, not fully obeying Scripture in some area.

Again, it is not as though we are to be people with no convictions. We should have strongly held, Biblical convictions. It is good and right that we should be committed to meetings of the church and its outreach activities as much as we are able. We should seek to be fully obedient to Scripture in the whole of our lives. If we feel that someone is

not obeying God in some area we should lovingly and humbly go to that person and point that out, as Jesus says just a few verses after this verse. But we need to beware of the critical, judging and condemning spirit that can so easily come when we are aware of what we think are shortcomings in our fellow believers.

3. What will happen to us if we judge others?

Jesus says, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." What does this mean?

I believe that the judgement that is spoken of here can be taken in two ways: both the final judgement on the last day for those who are not saved, and judgement that God brings upon his own people during this life, to discipline them.

1) Final judgement on the last day

The Bible tells us that there is a judgement day coming. Every one of us will be summoned to appear before the judgement seat of Christ. At that time everything that we have ever done, everything we have ever said, and even everything that we have ever thought will be revealed. And the Lord Jesus will judge men according to what they have done.

And what is the standard by which Jesus will judge men? The standard of his own absolute perfection and sinlessness, as revealed in the moral teaching of the Bible, and as perfectly lived out in his own life. All those who have not been saved by Christ will have to bear the punishment they deserve for their sinful lives. Those who have condemned others for their sins will be judged all the more severely, because God knows, and will reveal, how they have done very similar things to the those things for which they condemn others. By their condemnation

of others they were showing that they knew what was right and wrong, so if they themselves do the same things that they judge others for, the condemnation will be all the more severe. Paul says something very similar in Romans chapter 2 verses 1 – 3:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

So when Jesus says "Do not judge or you to will be judged" he is referring to the final judgement that those who are not believers will experience if they have judged others. Be warned anyone reading this who is not a believer: if you judge and condemn others, you will add to the already terrible amount of punishment which is being stored up for you on the final day. You must repent and come to Christ for salvation before it is too late.

2) "Judgement" in this life for believers

The other way in which I believe we can take what Jesus is saying here is to take it as referring to the chastening which God will give to believers if they adopt a judging attitude towards others. Those who are true believers do not need to fear condemnation at the final judgement, because, as the apostle Paul says, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8.1). But even though true believers do not need to fear condemnation, we need to be aware that our God is a holy God, and he expects us to be holy. If we rebel against him by sinning, whether it be the sin of judging others, or any other sin, then he will deal with us,

maybe very strongly and severely, in order to drive sin from us.

This is not the only place in the Bible where God's chastening is described in terms of "judgement". In his first letter, Peter says, in chapter 4 verse 17:

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

How does God "judge" or chastise his people? He can use various means, but it seems that what Jesus is particularly talking about here is the removal of the sense of his love and favour towards us, because he says "with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." If we are mean and stingy with our love and toleration of those whom we consider to be failing, God will be "tight" with us in our experience of his grace. It is not that God removes the true Christian from his Kingdom, and he becomes unforgiven. Once you have been washed clean from your sins, you are clean for ever. You are forever justified, forever declared "not guilty" in God's sight. Nothing can separate you from his love. But if we disobey him, such as by judging others, God can cause a cloud to come between us and him, so that we do not properly experience the sunshine of his love in our lives.

4. How can we stop judging others?

How, then, can we stop judging others?

The first things to say is that you cannot begin to overcome this sin of judging others unless you are a true Christian. Judging others is something which comes naturally to us. In and of ourselves it is inevitable that we shall continue to judge others unless we have been born again by the Holy Spirit, because pride is so deeply ingrained into us. You cannot

overcome this sin by yourself. You need God to change your heart. So if you are not as yet a true Christian, if you have not been born again, I would urge you, come to God and ask him to make you a new person. If you are a person who habitually judges others, then the very fact that you do this may itself be an indication that you are not yet a true Christian. Come to Christ. God is willing to save you, if you will but come to him.

But for those of us who are Christians, what can we do to overcome this sin of judging others? Here are some things I would mention:

1) Never forget your own sinfulness

If we would only knew thoroughly the extent of our own sinfulness, we would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to judge others. If you stop to think about it, at every point where you judge others, you are guilty of the same sin yourself, maybe in a different guise.

Perhaps you are tempted to condemn the serial adulterer. But how many times have you looked at photograph of someone who was indecently dressed, and lusted after that person? Jesus said that if a man looks on a woman with lust in his eye, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Perhaps you are tempted to judge the murderer. But how many times have you been sinfully angry with someone, or insulted them? Jesus said that "anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement", and "anyone who says "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of Hell." In other words, wrong anger and insults are a sign of lack of love, which at root is the same sin as murder.

Perhaps you are tempted to judge and condemn the idolater, whose house is stacked full of statues to various gods or so-

called saints. But how many times have you leafed through a catalogue, feeding your greedy desires for various possessions? How many times have you allowed covetousness to fill your heart and mind, instead of a true love and adoration of Almighty God? The Bible says that greed is idolatry.

Perhaps you are tempted to judge and condemn the disobedient child. What about you? Were you never disobedient as a child? Were you never disrespectful to your parents?

So remember your sinfulness. Meditate frequently on the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount and other places. Read the moral teaching of the apostles. Read the moral teaching of the Old Testament. Ask God to open up your eyes to see what you are really like. Be frequently at meetings of a church where the Bible is accurately taught, and listen with a teachable spirit. When God challenges you and convicts you, do not harden your heart, but let his Word wound you, that you might know the true extent of the sinfulness of your own heart.

2) Remember that your salvation is all of grace

If you are a Christian, why did Jesus die for your sins? Was it because you were better than the rest of mankind, and somehow more worthy? And why did he justify you and declare you not guilty? Was it because of your works, your attempts to obey God's law, his commandments? Not at all! We are "justified by faith", says the apostle, "apart from observing the law" (Romans 3.28). And why did God cause you to hear the Gospel, when so many others have never heard the Gospel? And why, when you heard the Gospel, did you have faith and repentance, when so many others have also heard but have remained blind in their sin, rebellion and

unbelief? Are you any better than they? Were you more religious? If you are a real Christian the ultimate reason why you are one is because God chose you. And why did he choose you, rather than others? Because he decided he would, not because you were worthy, but because he wanted to love you. So how can you look down on those poor unfortunate people who are still slaves of their sin? How can you despise them in your heart, when if it were not for God's grace you would be in exactly the same position? There is a famous quotation of a preacher who, when he saw a man going off to execution, said to himself "There, but for the grace of God, go I". That should be our attitude whenever we see anyone suffering the results of sin in his life. Remember, when you next see a drunkard, drug addict or prostitute "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

3) Remember that all gifts, whether natural or spiritual, are by God's grace

Not only is our salvation all of God's grace, but all the gifts that we have, whether natural or spiritual, are by God's grace. Are you someone who is well-organised, who has his life all worked out? If so, where did that ability to organise yourself come from? From God! Has God blessed you with spiritual gifts, so that you have been instrumental in the conversion of some, and the upbuilding of others in the faith? If so, where did those spiritual gifts come from? If you are a Christian, have you been enabled to make progress in your Christian life, so that you are not the ungodly person you once were? Have you, perhaps, made greater progress than another Christian who has been a Christian for much longer than you, but seems far behind you in certain areas? If so, where did the spiritual knowledge and wisdom that have brought these things about come from? The answer, of course, is from God. And why, again, has he given these gifts? Because we deserve

them? No. Because he has been gracious to hell-deserving sinners.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 7

For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

So if you are a Christian, remember you are a sinner saved by grace. You are entirely in debt to God for the whole of your salvation, and for every gift, natural and spiritual, that you are enabled to exercise. Put away all pride, all judgementalism, all condemnation, all looking down on others whom you might be tempted to think of as your moral or spiritual inferiors.

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