

Guarding Against A Critical Heart

Matthew 7:1-6

One of the things that I love about kids, and also annoys me at times, is how much we can see ourselves in them. There is a story about a five-year-old boy named Andrew. He was showing his kindergarten picture describing the kids in his class. "This is Robert; he hits everyone. This is Stephen. He never listens to the teacher. This is Mark. He chases us and is very noisy." Then pointing to himself, "And this is me. I'm just sitting here minding my own business."

If you had multiple young children you've seen this phenomenon. They'll be playing; then they start aggravating each other. Sure enough, one of the kids will come in to tell on his brother. "He hit me and I didn't do anything." Then a couple minutes later the other one comes in, "Brother pulled my hair and I wasn't doing anything."

We can be the same way. It's so easy to see problems in others and completely miss them in ourselves. And then we criticize those faults, we make all sorts of negative assumptions about their motives and intentions, we judge their faith, and we label them with this negative trait or having that character flaw.

However, if anyone dares point out those faults in us, we grow defensive, we have reasons and justifications, people just don't understand. It's different for us.

As we head into the closing verses of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deals sharply, and even a bit humorously, with a judgmental, critical heart.

Matt 7:1-6

7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 "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? 4 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? 5 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.

6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; 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. What Jesus Did Not Mean

This passage, at least verse 1, "*Do not judge, or you too will be judged*" is one of the most quoted of all Bible verses. In fact, it may be better known these days, than John 3:16. This is one of the few Bible verses that is known by everyone, even non-Christians.

This verse may be well-known. It may be often quoted, but it is also one of the least understood of all of Jesus' sayings. People quote this as though Jesus said, "Do not judge...Period!" They

treat it like it's the only thing that Jesus had to say on the subject, and they throw this quote around like it forbids any Christian from making any sort of comment about anything.

If the church says anything about morality, here comes the sharp retort, "*Do not judge.*" If we confront someone about a sin in their life, "Who are you to judge me? After all, Jesus said, '*Do not judge.*'" If we try to point to a better way, again the refrain is heard, "*Do not judge.* That's what your own Bible says. Jesus himself tells you, you can't judge, so keep your mouth shut. You Christians keep your thoughts and opinions to yourselves, because you can't judge."

But is this what Jesus is telling us? Was Jesus teaching that we shouldn't make moral judgments, that we shouldn't speak up for the truth, that we shouldn't defend what is right, that we should never point out sin?

Absolutely not! Jesus could not mean this, because it would contradict so much of what else he had to say. Even in this very passage, in verse 6, Jesus calls us to make a judgment about giving what is sacred to dogs and casting pearls before swine. Now you can't do that without making some basic judgment calls. Are these pearls? And are they a pig? Judgement.

In verses 13 and 14 Jesus calls us to judge between the narrow gate and the wide gate, and to choose the narrow. In verses 15-20 He calls us to be on guard against false prophets. Jesus says that we can discern, judge, between good fruit and bad fruit. Then he tells us to build our lives on the solid rock of His word, and not on the shifting sands of doing whatever the heck we want. Jesus calls us to make all sorts of judgments about all sorts of things.

Being able to make sound judgments is an essential part of the Christian life. We are to be discerning in our decisions, perceptive in what we believe, and carefully discriminate between right and wrong. Jesus never meant what many today think he meant. To misquote Inigo Montoya from the Princess Bride. "You keep quoting that verse. I do not think it means what you think it means."

II. What Jesus Did Mean

So if Jesus wasn't telling us to shut up and keep our judgments to ourselves, what did he mean? The word Jesus uses for judge simply means to evaluate or analyze. It can have all sorts of shades of meaning depending on the context. Here, it is referring to someone who evaluates others with a critical heart in order to tear them down and build themselves up.

When Jesus says, "Do not judge," He doesn't mean, "Do not think." Jesus is not speaking against sound judgment, but a certain kind of judging. Jesus is speaking against the self-righteous, self-serving, unmerciful condemnation of others that was so often practiced by the Pharisees.

John Stott, remarks that this command "is not a requirement to be blind, but rather a plea to be generous."

There is a big difference between the kind of judging we should do, with an understanding heart that offers a helping hand and the kind of critical heart that Jesus forbids here with a finger pointed in condemnation. Wrong judgment wants to tear others down. Right judgment seeks to build others up. Wrong judgment serves self-interest. Right judgment is interested in serving others. Wrong judgment is destructive. Right judgment is constructive. Wrong judgment pulls people apart. Right judgment brings us closer together.

How do we guard ourselves from judging with a critical heart? And it's so easy to do. How do we insure that we make right judgments that seek not just truth, but also grace? Well, Jesus gives us three things.

A. Hold Yourself to the Same Standard You Hold Others To

The first thing you can do to guard against a critical heart is hold yourself to the same standard you hold others to. We can't have rules for thee but not for me. What I expect of you, I also expect of myself. When we hold ourselves to the same standard as everyone else, there is much less of a chance of being a self-righteous, judgmental jerk.

Listen to verse 2, Jesus says, *"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* If you don't judge yourself with the same standard, you can be absolutely certain everyone else will.

Allison is studying to be a teacher so teaching oriented things catch my eye. I saw a website aimed at coaching teachers with this advice, "Hold yourself to the same standards your students comply with to reinforce that these standards exist for a reason, out of respect for each other and learning."

For example, if students are required to show proof of why they are late, then the teacher should provide proof such as taking a selfie with your flat tire and roadside assistance.

Harsh, critical, judgmental people nearly always hold themselves to a different standard than they hold others to. They've got one yardstick for themselves, and a different one for others.

When we hold others to a different standard, it has a way of reflecting back on us. Have you ever watched a kitten discover a mirror for the very first time? They are surprised to find another cat, who is just as surprised to see them. They puff up and arch their back to show that other cat who is boss, but that cat is not intimidated in the least. They bare their fangs and unleash their fiercest hiss. The meaner they get, the meaner the other cat gets.

Life has a way of reflecting back the kind of judgment we use on others. Sooner or later, we'll all be measured by our own yardstick. This is why we need to be careful how we judge others. It's like Steve Martin said, "Never judge a man unless you've walked a mile in his shoes. Then you'll be a mile away and you'll have his shoes."

But it isn't just life that will reflect back the same judgment we use on others. Jesus is warning us that God himself will use our own yardstick to measure us. The same grace, the same mercy, the same forgiveness we show others will be shown us. But we will also receive the same harsh criticism, the same unfair demands, the same unreasonable cold shoulder. To be quick in judging others is to invite God to judge us. This is why we should hold ourselves to the same standard to guard against a critical heart.

B. Judge Yourself First

So first, hold yourself to the same standard you hold others to. Secondly, Jesus says that before you ever judge someone else, judge yourself first. Put your own life under the microscope before you zoom in on anyone else. Here's an easy way to remember this principle – look in the mirror first. Or as Jesus says here:

3"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? 4 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? 5 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.

Jesus uses the ridiculous, but very pointed image of someone trying to perform eye surgery while he's got this huge log or large board sticking out of his own eye. I'll tell you what. Don't let that doctor anywhere near my own eye.

I remember when I was kid and my dad was preaching through the Sermon on the Mount he had this comic book superhero called Logman. It was old school. We didn't have PowerPoint, we had overhead projectors with transparencies, and I was my dad's remote control. I followed along with his sermons and changed the transparencies.

I'll never forget Logman. He had this giant beam sticking out of his eye and he wanted to go around taking the specks out of everyone else's eye. I'll tell you what - don't let Logman anywhere near my own eye. And don't be logman.

Would you hire a mechanic whose own car was a rickety piece of junk that got better fuel mileage than it got oil mileage?

When we lived in Kansas we had a neighbor who lived across the street. He had a big sign in his front yard, "Leon's Handyman service." And it listed all the things he could do: construction, remodeling, yard work, and so on. The only problem was that Leon's house was the biggest dump in town. When they moved, the new owners had to completely gut the house and start from scratch. Nobody hired Leon because it was obvious he couldn't do for himself what he claimed he could do for others. It was a running joke in that little Kansas town.

It is so easy to see a problem in others, yet so difficult to see it in ourselves. This is why no one ever shows up at a protest rally with a sign that says, "I am the problem." Human nature always

sees the problem starting with someone else. I'm only the victim. But Jesus teaches us to always look in the mirror first. Number one. Hold yourself to the same standard. Number two – judge yourself first.

C. Work With the Other Person to Help Them

Number three, Jesus says that we need to work with the other person to help them. It's hard to look at someone with a critical heart, if your heart's desire is to help them. Jesus' goal here isn't Christians ignoring each other's problems, and pretending they don't exist. Nor does Jesus have a vision of believers pointing out each other's faults and putting them in their place. No. Our Savior's heart here is brothers and sisters in Christ helping each other to overcome their problems. His goal is being able to see clearly to help our brother or sister remove the speck from their eye.

Notice that this is a mutual process that involves both the one with the speck and the one trying to remove it. The one helping asks, "Let me help you." And the other person willingly invites them to help. They are active participants in the process. And so we work with them.

Paul writes in Galatians 6:1, *"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."*

What Jesus describes here is not a judge with gavel in hand ready to pronounce a sentence. Instead, he pictures a surgeon, scalpel in hand, ready to help and to heal. That's how we respond to those who want help.

However, there will always be those who don't want our help. They don't mind the speck in their eye. It's not a bug. It's feature. What do we do then? How should we handle those who have no interest in growing spiritually?

D. Don't Force Your Help on Those Who Don't Want It.

Well Jesus tells us- Don't force your help on those who don't want it. You don't need to condemn them. You don't develop a critical heart toward them. You simply let them be, and leave them to their own choices. In verse 6 he says, *"Do not give dogs what is sacred; 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."*

Trying to give spiritual truth to those who don't care is like giving sacred treasure to dogs so they can just bury it in the dirt, or precious jewels hog so they can wallow with it in the mud. You can't help those who don't want help. You can't teach those who don't want to listen.

The kind of judging that Jesus condemns forces itself on people. It doesn't ask to help. It doesn't seek willing participation. It manipulates, and it forces itself on them whether they want the help or not. Jesus isn't saying mind our own business. He wants us to be our brother's keeper, but he wants us to do it in a way that is kind, loving and helpful.

First, make sure you're living according to the same standard. Don't hold them to a different set of rules, so you look in the mirror first. You judge yourself first. Once you've made sure your own life is in order, then you go to them and try to help them, but if they don't want to be helped, you can't force them. There comes a point where you have to go your own way, and you have to let them go their own way. You keep loving them. You keep praying for them, but until they want help, you won't be able to.

Conclusion:

We need to be very careful before we start pointing fingers at others. There was a lady in an airport who bought a book to read and a package of cookies to eat while she waited for her plane. After she had taken her seat in the terminal and began to read her book, she noticed that the man sitting one seat away from her was fumbling to open up the package of cookies on the seat between them.

She couldn't believe the audacity of this man, a complete stranger, who would just open her cookies. He took one and ate it ... She was so hot and steamed. She would show him that she was not going to be intimidated. She reached into the bag and took a cookie and ate it ...

He just reached over and took another cookie. Well there was no way she was going to let him eat all of her cookies. So she took another cookie and ate it. This went back and forth until they finally got down to the last cookie. The man reached into the bottom of the bag, broke the cookie in half, ate it, glared at the woman, then got up and left.

"The nerve of some people!" she thought. "How selfish and arrogant can you get?" she muttered under her breath. Soon the announcement came to board the plane. She took her seat still hot and bothered, buckled her belt, reached into her purse for a tissue, and there was her bag of cookies.