

“BE CAREFUL HOW YOU JUDGE.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

November 17, 2019, 6 pm

Text for the Sermon: Matthew 7:1-6

Introduction.

I'm not sure I can prove it, but Matthew 7:1 might be one of the most quoted verses in America. It's certainly one of America's most favorite verses.

There are few passages that have had more error in thinking come out of them, I would be willing to put this one in the top ten.

We live in a post-modern and post-Christian culture that says in order to be politically correct (PC) and socially acceptable we must be tolerant of all the ideas, words and actions of others. Abortion is a personal choice, homosexuality is a viable alternative lifestyle, the lottery is government approved entertainment, and what people do in private should have no bearing on their public lives and professional positions.

To pass judgment on the lifestyles, choices and actions of others is considered the height of arrogance and certainly intolerant and even un-Christian. Who are we to say and by what standard can we say it?

The word for the day is *tolerance* and this is the text. “Judge not, lest ye be judged.” The world wants the church to be quiet, to stay out of the public arena, to not make pronouncements. So, they say to us, judge not, don't judge, never express an opinion about the words or actions of others. We are to be tolerant and quiet.

This is a challenging text to understand well and get right. But we have to get this right or we are going to continue to be just as muddled and confused as the world.

So, what are we to do with Matthew 7:1? Jesus says do not judge, right? Does it stand by itself as an absolute? Well by itself, we can't understand it rightly. And the problem with America is it doesn't know Scripture.

If you take a text out of context all you end up with is a proof text, but you don't arrive at the truth. In this case the explanation for how we should understand Matthew 7:1 is found in the rest of the context of our passage. Jesus begins with a pronouncement and then gives the meaning and explanation. If you stop with the first statement you won't know what He means by it.

From the context it's clear that this passage doesn't mean Christians are never to pass judgment or use discernment and make distinctions between right and wrong and good and evil.

Jesus is not prohibiting all judging but a certain type of judging. From the context we learn that Christians are in fact to judge and make judgments. That's why I didn't title the sermon, "Don't Judge," but rather, "Be Careful How You Judge." Let's learn how. There are at least three clarifications that Jesus makes.

No double standard judging, 7:2.

Jesus warns us about how we judge and by what standard. There can be no double-standard, one standard for ourselves and another standard for everyone else. If we judge others self-righteously then we will be judged in the same way.

None of us has any righteousness of our own which we can use as some sort of standard for judging others. Self-righteousness makes us blind to our own sin and to Christ's grace.

In a word, don't make judgments that turn around to condemn you? The judgment we apply to others will be applied to ourselves.

One of the reasons the Pharisees were so self-righteous, so judgmental and quick to condemn is that they had a double-standard. They put burdens on others they didn't carry.

Let me give two examples from the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy" (Matt. 5:7). Here He is just saying the reverse, "Those who are unmerciful will receive no mercy."

Jesus said, "God will not forgive us our sins if we do not forgive the sins of others against us" (Matt 6:15).

We will reap what we sow. If we sow criticism, we will reap criticism, if we sow judgmentally, we will receive judgment. If we demand perfectionism, we will be held to our same standard.

Some of us here were raised by some pretty demanding parents, parents hard to please, couldn't ever measure up. We know the pressure of perfectionist. Let's learn to give grace and mercy, to quickly give forgiveness that we might receive the same.

What do we need most, what do we need more than anything else? Then let's be sure to give the same.

No one way judging. 7:3-5.

There are certain fixed laws in nature like the law of gravity and there are certain fixed laws in human nature, like consistently seeing others sins as much larger than our own.

This is one of Jesus' best known and best remembered illustrations to help us remember this fundamental law of human nature. It's both funny and serious. Picture a person with a 2x12 sticking out of their eye coming up to you and saying, "Here let me get that little piece of sawdust out of the corner of your eye."

Aren't we all more aware of the sins of others than our own? How is it that we can see so well when we are so blind? Our vision is 20/20 when we look at others but when we look in the mirror, we are legally blind, 20/400.

Remember **David's** adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband, Uriah. Remember after about a year God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David and Nathan tells a story about a man who had lots of sheep but when a guest came, he went and took the only sheep of another man to feed his guest? Remember David's response?

II Samuel 12:5 David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, **6** and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

David was able to instantly judge that man's sin and failed to see his own, until Nathan, said you are the man.

We are not to be so blind as to notice nothing, nor are we to be half-blind, noticing nothing in ourselves. Yes, there are things in others that should be judged and dealt with, but we must judge our self-first.

Start with your own house. It's so easy to confess other people's sins. We can do it all day long and many of us do, especially husbands and wives.

After you have taken care of your own business, after you have repented and turned from your own sin, then you can help your brother. And chances are better that he will receive your help and see it actually as help if it's from one who has been down the same road and is not coming off self-righteous or arrogant or hypocritical.

There will be humility and restraint when we have dealt with our self-first. Be slow, be careful.

No blind or indiscriminate judging, 7:6.

Jesus has warned us against self-righteousness and double standards. He has warned us about hypocritical arrogance and being blind to our own sin. Now he warns us against indiscriminate tolerance.

Vs. 6 reminds us that when Jesus says judge not, he is not saying don't make any judgments about sin, about good and evil, right and wrong. It takes discernment and spiritual insight to know what is a dog and what is a pig and what is holy.

In Matthew 7:15. Jesus says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

Don't go from one extreme to another as some Christians and churches do. Some are pharisaic, judging and condemning and self-righteous, looking down from on high on everyone who is not like them.

Some are antinomian, throwing the baby out with the bath water, overlooking all sin in an overzealous attempt to appeal to everyone. They judge nothing and stand for nothing. Evil is called good and good evil. Tolerance trumps truth and holiness is dragged through the mud.

Jesus is calling us to see more clearly, not less clearly. He is calling us to turn a clear eye not a blind eye to the matters at hand.

A person who casts pearls before swine understands neither the value of pearls nor the nature of pigs.

These strong words are not meant to describe all non-Christians but those who have shown outwardly stubborn contempt for God. Do not take what is holy and subject it to the mockery of the blatantly godless.

There is an excellent *illustration* of this principle in:

Matthew 21:23 The chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" **24** Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. **25** The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' **26** But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." **27** So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Jesus was testing them to see if they were dogs or swine. Basically, He was saying, “I will not cast the pearls of my truth before you who will just trample them.” Dogs and pigs don’t care about truth and honesty. We can only pray for God to change their heart.

We are to spread the seed of the good news of the gospel, but where it is stubbornly resisted and rebelled against, we move on, even shaking the dust off our feet. By their response you will know, by their fruit you will know them.

As a side note here, never forget that the teaching of Christ, the gospel, the Word of God is a costly pearl, like much fine gold. It’s a precious treasure that you have received. Your salvation is truly of inestimable worth, the greatest asset you can ever possess. Never underestimate the supreme value of your salvation and the gospel written in Scripture and preached each Sunday.

Be Careful How You judge.

Are we to confront sin when we see it? Yes, it’s our spiritual obligation to do so if we love God and honor and value His Word. Christians must judge the explicitly sinful behavior of a professing Christian.

We are to speak the truth in love. We are to rescue the perishing. We are to announce the good news of forgiveness of sins to those who will hear and repent.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. **2** Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

We judge but not as the world judges. Our spirit is to be different, it’s with humility and with a view to forgiveness restoration.

We are to judge with mercy, because we have received mercy and we want mercy.

When we judge we do so careful to deal with our own sin first so there is no hypocrisy in us.

Romans 2:1 In passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. **2** We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. **3** Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?

When we have dealt with our own serious sins, we learn something about sin. We learn about the seriousness of it, we learn how quickly and easily we fall into the devil’s traps and how susceptible we are to temptations. We learn something about Satan’s powers and subtle

ways. We learn about God's discipline and correction and about His compassion, kindness and forgiveness.

All of this is very useful when dealing with and confronting others in their sin.

We come not as a foe, not as an adversary, not as critic, not as a perfectionist, nor as a judge, but as a brother, a true friend and helper, anxious to rescue, heal and restore. One blind man helping another blind man to see.

We do it as repentant sinners, saved by the miracle of God's grace. This is what we hold out. Repentant sinners can confront unrepentant sinners and call them to repentance.

Applications and conclusion.

I trust now that you see the folly of making the first verse an absolute rule. If it is true that no one is to judge another at all then all parental discipline and church discipline and civil discipline is lost, and we would have chaos in our homes, churches, and country.

If we want to be better people or have better homes, a better church, or a better country we are going to have to have meaningful moral conversations and that means we will have to exercise discernment and good judgment. We have to be able to say this is good and that is evil, this is true and that is wrong.

Without judgment there can be no repentance, no improvement, no reform, no spiritual self-examination, hence no Christian life and growth in grace and sanctification.

With the Holy Spirit we can do this and with the spirit of repentance we can begin to love one another as Christ first loved us. If we have judged anyone here self-righteously, unrighteously, hypocritically, blindly, without knowing facts or circumstances, as a foe or adversary rather than as a brother or sister, publicly when it should have been privately, if we have judged in any of these ways let us confess it and repent first to God and then to one another. Let us love one another as Jesus has loved us.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for giving the gift of your Holy Spirit to your church, to all who confess the name of Jesus. By your Spirit in us enable us to live the life Jesus lived, to do what He said to do. Rightly apply your Word to our hearts for the sake of the glory of gospel of your Son in your church. In His most holy and worthy name, Amen.