

A Judgmental Heart and the Kingdom of God

Matthew 7:1-6

Proposition: Resist a judgmental heart, because it is a roadblock in the pursuit of righteousness.

Introduction

Passing vs. Getting Passed

Why do we desire to point out the wrongdoing of others and ignore our own error? I would argue that this is and always has been one of the primary symptoms of sin. If we think back to the first sin ever committed, we will remember that it was closely followed by the first round of the blame game ever played. God asked Adam if he had sinned, so Adam admitted that he had but that it was Eve's fault, so Eve admitted to eating but made sure God knew that it was the Serpent's fault and not her own. Since the Fall, our hearts have sought to enact judgement rather than be repentant. We want to be the Judge rather than the criminal.

No doubt, Jesus was quite familiar with this tendency in the human heart and how inseparable it is from our sinfulness, which is why he makes this passage one of the final statements in his most significant sermon. So far, he has laid out the definition of righteousness and thorough instruction for practicing it. Now, he provides instruction that, if obeyed, will prevent the use of the preceding sermon as a weapon of self-righteousness. That instruction can be summarized like this:

Proposition: Resist a judgmental heart, because it is a roadblock in the pursuit of righteousness.

Jesus desperately wants us to avoid a judgmental heart attitude, so in this passage he gives us a command not to judge and provides three reasons to obey.

1. Do Not Judge (v.1a)

This command is the focal point of the entire passage, so it is vital that we understand what it is and what it is not. Let's start with what the word "judge" means here. The word used in the original language is a wide term and can mean anything from making a decision to formally condemning, so we must use context to determine meaning. In this situation, "judge" seems to be used fairly generally and mean **"to declare the action of another as a violation of God's law."** Using that definition, here is the definition of a judgmental heart as I will use it this morning: **A heart which responds to God's law by immediately seeking to declare the action of another as a violation of God's law.**

On to what this command is and what it is not. We will begin with what it is not, because it clarifies what it is. This command is not a universal prohibition on addressing the sin of others. In other words, this is not a command to tolerate. Remember, the Jesus speaking here is the same Jesus who would flip the tables of the merchants in the temple and call the Pharisees a brood of vipers. This is the same Jesus who gives careful instruction in Matthew 18:15-18 on how to approach a brother about his sin. And this is the same Jesus who, later on in this passage affirms our role in cleaning our brother's eyes.

If this is a prohibition on addressing the sin of another, then Jesus should be disregarded as a hypocritical lunatic. But, then, what is it? And why does he so clearly say, “Do not judge?” Allow me to illustrate.

VBS Kids and the Table Illustration

The primary response I desired from the kids I was teaching was to listen. The information I was about to provide would help them succeed and have joy at my station and I didn't want them to miss it. My instruction not to touch was not a prohibition, but a limitation that I instituted for their good. My desire was not untouched materials, but listening children. In the same way, Jesus's desire was not unchecked believers, but listening hearts. Jesus was providing a constructive limitation on judging rather than a raw prohibition. In light of this, I think it is fair to say that Jesus is commanding us to resist judgmental heart as we defined it before rather than banning the act of judging. Following his command, Jesus gives us the primary reason that we ought to obey it. That reason is that:

2. God, in his justice, judges us in the same way we judge others. (v.1b-2)

In other words, God responds to us judging others by judging us by the same standard. Now, I realize that this language is a little bit cryptic and difficult to get a handle on, so let's start by understanding what Jesus is not saying and make our way to what he is saying.

Jesus here is NOT talking about eternal judgement. We know that the eternal position of each soul is determined not by the works they do, but by whether or not they submitted to the

Lordship of Christ and were washed by his atoning blood. However, the Bible makes it clear that **all people, though their eternal destination has been determined by their submission to Christ or their rebellion from Christ, will be judged by their works to determine their eternal reward in heaven or punishment in hell.** So, when Jesus says that God judges us in the same way we judge others, he is referring to this judgment of works which determines reward, not an eternally condemning judgement.

We get a valuable insight on the nature of this judgement from Jesus's word in Luke 12:41-48. In this parable Jesus tells of a steward who manages his master's possessions well and several who manage poorly. He ends the parable saying this:

47 And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, 48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

The variable is not whether or not the stewards kept their jobs, that was secure. The variable was what their reward or consequence would be, and this decision was made based upon not only what the stewards did, but what their level of understanding was.

And, according to the words of Jesus in our passage, the same concept applies to enacting judgement. Here's why.

When we judge the actions of another, we demonstrate that we understand God's commands well enough to not only

communicate them as a teacher would, but to correctly identify when they are broken. This understanding we demonstrate eliminates any plea of ignorance that we could have had before God. In other words, we can't tell God that we didn't understand his commands if we have told others that they didn't. Therefore, when God judges our works to determine our eternal heavenly reward, **his justice demands that we be judged in equal measure to the judgment we enacted.**

So, why does this matter? And why does Jesus choose this concept as the foundational reason to resist a judgmental heart? Here's why. When we live with a judgmental heart, we never deal with our own sin. We never allow God's Word to mold and change our hearts. However, God's judgement will not make the same oversight. He will examine our hearts, and he will examine our hearts as closely as we did the hearts of others. And when he does, if we have lived a judgmental life, he won't like what he sees, and neither will we. We will be shocked and grieved at the amount of sin which we have allowed to live within us. Friends, **when we choose to have a judgmental heart attitude, we choose to use God's holy instruction as a tool to enable and advance our sinfulness rather than our righteous.** We choose to abandon our pursuit of right relationship with God in favor of an effort to preserve our own sins. We choose a lesser portion on earth, and we choose a lesser portion in heaven. Lord, save us from this folly. The second reason Jesus gives to resist a judgmental heart is that:

2. A judgmental heart prevents effective ministry to our brothers and sisters. (v. 3-5)

To help us understand why this is true, Jesus asks us two questions of ourselves. This first question, found in v. 3 is: Why? Why do we see the speck but miss the log? As I asked this question of my own heart, this is the answer I arrived at:

When I have a judgmental heart attitude, my desire is not clean eyes, but to find dirty eyes. I don't want righteousness, I want to point out unrighteousness.

When we have a judgmental heart attitude, we are not seeking the righteousness that characterizes the kingdom of God as Jesus instructed us just a few verses ago. We couldn't care less about whether or not the law of the Lord is being upheld. All God's instruction for us is a platform to realize our prideful desires for correctness and power and control.

Dinner Table Manners Illustration

If I really cared about politeness, the first thing I should do is put a shirt on and wash my hands. That would make the dinner table far politer as a whole than my brother holding his fork correctly.

The second question Jesus asks, found in verse 4, is: How? How could you even think about removing the speck? The answer is that we have no idea there is a log in our eye, because we have chosen to blind ourselves to it. Because of

this blindness, we also have no idea how it has rendered us ineffective. What this means is that faulty desire revealed in the first question has given birth to ineffective action. The reality is that there is no way we will ever clean our brother's eye with a log in our own, but desires of our heart have blinded us to this reality, and we act out of that blindness.

Jesus follows his two questions with a simple instruction: take the log out of your eye. Don't sit in the jail of a judgmental heart any longer. Come out so that you and your brother can pursue righteousness together. At the root of this instruction is a change of heart. Put off the pride that leads you to enact foolish judgment while ignoring your own sin. Put on a sincere desire for righteousness that leads you to keep your own eyes clean and help a brother in need do the same, so that you both may enjoy the benefits of clean eyes and clear vision. Jesus finish this thought with one final reason to resist a judgmental heart, and that is that

4. A judgmental heart hinders our outreach to unbelievers. (v.6)

In this last verse, Jesus teaches about the downfall of a judgmental heart when it interacts with those who are far from God. Allow me to explain.

In the analogy Jesus uses, unbelievers are compared with dogs and pigs. The Word of God is compared with a holy thing and pearls. The point Jesus makes here is that, just as pearls are of little use to pigs, God's instruction is of little use to the wanderer.

Now, this poses quite a problem to a person with a judgmental heart, because their desire is to point out the infractions of God's law, or to throw the pearls. Even though this type of interaction is useless to the unbelieving heart, it is the only possible overflow of the judgmental heart, so their ministry to the unbeliever is rendered ineffective, or even self-destructive.

To put it another way, the unbeliever has eyes that can neither see nor feel. Their eyes are completely dead. It is silly for us to pretend to fix their problem by cleaning their eyes, because they will inevitably become dirty again in their deadness. They need living eyes if they are to ever have clean eyes. Now, allow me to stray from the trail a little bit to say the most important thing I will say all morning.

If you are listening right now and are not in Christ, you have two dead eyes and are plodding about in darkness, stumbling your way towards eternal separation from the giver of living eyes. This sermon is of no use to you, because, even if you clear your eyes out this morning, they will become clogged with the dust and gravel and logs of the world without delay and without your realizing it. Your problem is not dirty eyes, your problem is dead eyes. But, Jesus himself has purchased life for your dead eyes and requires only a heart that submits to his Lordship to receive them. If you have never repented of your sin, confessed your need for a savior, and submitted to Jesus Christ as that savior and as Lord, you must do that this morning. Do not wait. Give your life to Christ and receive living eyes.

If you are in Christ, the response to this point is much the same as the last one. Put off your judgmental heart attitude and earnestly desire living and clean eyes for all people.

Conclusion

Now that we have seen how a judgmental heart stands in the way of our own righteousness, the righteousness of our brothers and sisters, and the righteousness of unbelievers, one question remains; how do we avoid it?

Our right response can be summed up in one word: humility. If you are a mature believer who is often asked to clean the eyes of others, be humble. Approach each speck of sin you are asked to remove with caution and careful self-examination, remembering the draw in your own heart towards that same sin. Remember your utter dependence on the grace of God, who has graciously given you living eyes and chooses to keep them alive each moment. Seek first personal righteousness, for the sake of everyone.

If you are a young believer who often finds yourself with dirty eyes, be humble. Rest not on your own efforts to keep your eyes clean, but on the promises of God to bring you to maturity. Don't grow weary of asking for help from those other believers God has blessed you with. Seek first personal righteousness, for the sake of everyone.

If you have not yet given your life to Christ and have dead eyes, be humble. Recognize your great need for redemption and submit yourself to the Lordship of Christ. Any

pursuit of personal righteousness will be as useful to you as pearls are to swine if you do not give your life to Christ.

Church, hear me as I plead with you:

Resist a judgmental heart, and embrace righteous humility.