

# One Sermon That Changed The World

## Judgy McJudgerson

October 29, 2023 A.M.  
West Side Church of Christ  
Searcy, Arkansas  
Nathan Guy

### Scripture Reading

*“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5 ESV)*

### INTRODUCTION

“While visiting a neighbor, five-year-old Andrew pulled out his kindergarten class picture and immediately began describing each classmate. “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.” Pointing to his own picture, Andrew commented, “And this is me. I’m just sitting here minding my own business.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s us, isn’t it? Everyone else has a major problem, and then there’s us—the one sitting there minding our own business. 35 years ago at College Church, Mike Cope gave this illustration. When it’s myself, I can say “I reconsidered.” When it’s you, I say, “you changed your mind.” When it’s them, I say, “they went back on their word!”

It’s more than our choice of words; it's a matter of judging the thoughts and intents of the heart. It’s how we see others. We size people up. We know the situation. We can peer into each other’s souls. We know the real motives. We act as if we are omniscient. Or, maybe not omniscient; but at least “we know people.” Or “We know your kind.”

---

<sup>1</sup> This story is attributed to Cathy Pate of Orlando, Florida.

And we assume the worst. And, lo and behold, our prophecy is fulfilled: people end up falling to our lowest expectations.

We do it for a number of reasons. We judge people because it makes us feel superior to them. We judge people because it makes us feel better about ourselves. We judge people because we think we are doing them a favor. But in all of our judging, we see the worst, believe the worst, and bring out the worst.

But what if...what if we assumed the best? It's harder than we might think at first. It is far easier to jump to negative conclusions about people than it is to assume the best about them. But it was St. Ambrose who said "nothing graces the Christian soul as much as mercy." When someone has wronged us, what if we said to ourselves, "maybe it was an off day. Maybe it's all just a big misunderstanding. Maybe we just need to be forgiving, for they don't know what they are doing." It worked for our Lord.

## **JUDGE NOT**

This is how Jesus means for us to hear the text for today. There is a reason why the "golden rule" appears just a few verses later. Our text is the golden rule applied to how we measure people up. How would you want people to think about you? You'd want them to think the best about you. And even when they know—I mean they KNOW—your faults and foibles, your inclinations, and your obsessions; even when they know you are being at your worst—you want them to lovingly, kindly, and gently see it as an anomaly. Imagine if a scene from the story of your life sat freeze framed in everyone's mind set forever on the worst moment of your life? On the other hand, what if people's recollection of you is always and forever when you were at your best?

Of course, you have probably had this verse thrown in your face when you have dared to have convictions and shared them. You dared to tell your teenage son they headed for trouble, to which they responded, "Don't judge me, man!" It's not just your teenagers. It's the whole world, isn't it? "Who are you to tell me how to live my life? Christians are so judgmental." Think about that sentence for a minute: "Christians are so judgmental." Do you know what that is? A judgment! And it's a massively sweeping judgment about all Christians!

Yes, we could talk about the hypocrisy of such a statement. But if you are going to relate, communicate, and talk about life involving anyone other than yourself, you can't escape making judgments. And, it turns out, that is completely appropriate. We all make judgments, and Jesus does call us to make judgments. We are called to judge values and actions. In the Gospel of John, Jesus told the religious leaders, "Stop judging by mere appearances" (7:24), stop judging "by human standards" (8:15), "but instead judge

correctly” (7:24) We are also called to make judgments about people. The church in Corinth was young and green, still struggling to put away the paganism of their former life. There was a major sexual scandal going on in the church, and instead of dealing with it, the church was boasting about it! So Paul writes to them and says, “I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this” (1 Cor 5:5), and then Paul reminds the church they have a responsibility to judge those on the inside (1 Cor 5:12). So to help us avoid confusion, perhaps we should use a different word for what God calls us to do. Let’s call this form of judgment “discerning” or “assessing.”

We are supposed to discern and assess other people and their actions. There is the way of wisdom and the way of fools, says Proverbs; failing to assess the situation can mean ruin for you. Don’t follow the crowd in doing ungodly and immoral things, says Paul; and have nothing to do with a divisive person who loves to sow discord in the church (Titus 3:10). How can you know any of that if you don’t stop to assess? Of course we should recognize the difference between beauty and ugliness, truth and lies, good and evil.

And we should say something about it. If you saw your best friend stuck in a burning building, and walked by without doing or saying anything, you would be the most heartless person on the planet. Sometimes the most loving thing one can do is to announce that you are in danger and unless we change the situation of your life, you are not going to make it. Drug addicts need interventions. Alcoholics need rehabilitation. And the only way that happens is if someone is willing to step up and step out with a word of concern. But how can you do that unless you size up the situation for what it is, see the evil for what it is, and do something about it? If we know that is true with people in addictions or stuck in burning buildings, how can it not be true with people stuck in their sins? Jude tells us that warning others trapped in a sinful condition is “snatching them from the flames” (Jude 23).

Whether physically or spiritually, it is good, and right, and often necessary to discern and assess. Assessing is to take note of the situation and call it for what it is. But judging—at least in the sense Jesus is warning about—is something different altogether. This is criticism without true concern. Critique *with* concern is done by a person who stands by you to help you get out of your troubles is a true friend. It is a life-giving act. But critique *without* concern, lobbing grenades at a distance, can only destroy.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Life*, p. 187-88.

In 2006, Barna research group joined up with Pew research poll to ask the largest survey of non-Christians ever recorded this question: “what word comes to mind that describes Christians?” The top two words were these: “judgmental” and “hypocritical.”<sup>3</sup>

Are we ever guilty of that? Always denouncing Hollywood and Washington, using social media to respond to the latest headline with a virtue-signaling response that let’s all those in our in-group know that we hate the right people, as we stand at a distance, rubbing our finger with a “tisk, tisk, shame, shame” repugnant look on our face? With no possible way of producing any good, it simply serves to make us feel better, to make us feel superior, to help us ignore the troubles in our own lives by constantly pointing the finger at everyone else?

It usually involves seeing “them” in a different category than how we see “us.”

### A CHANGE OF HEART

What we need is a change of heart. And that usually comes with a change of perspective. In the first two chapters of Jesus’ sermon, he describes an upside-down kingdom with followers who never measure up to the world’s standards; this means that as Christians living in the upside kingdom, we will be judged by the world wrongly. We will be misunderstood. When we do our deeds in secret, people will question if we have done any good deeds at all! When we suffer without retaliation, people will wonder if we have any self-pride or determination. We will be misjudged. So why in the world would the Christian stand in judgment on anyone else?

The text today—Matthew 7:1-5—actually seems to make 3 challenges. First, avoid being *hypercritical*. Do you know the type? They find trouble under every rock, and heresy in your every word. We are God’s fruit inspectors, your friendly neighborhood watchdog, doing God a favor as the gate-keeping screen doors of the kingdom. Verse 1 shows the problem with that. With the same measure you judge others, you yourself will be judged. God’s name is not mentioned in this verse. Sounds to me like good, plain wisdom: be a fault-finder and someone will eventually come and expose every uncomfortable truth about you.

In my experience, the hypercritical are often the least informed. The people quickest to think themselves right and everybody else wrong lack nuance in their thinking that comes from self-reflection. To quote Tim Mackie, their “arrogance toward others” is tied to their “ignorance toward themselves.” I know this well. I was a card-carrying

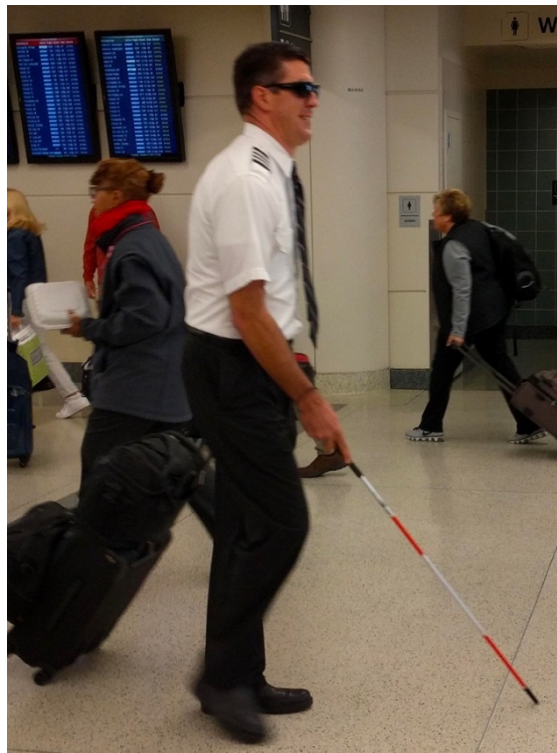
---

<sup>3</sup> Tim Mackie, “To Judge or Not to Judge.” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd42f1zT\\_eE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd42f1zT_eE)

member of the fruit inspector society. And even when I saw how unhealthy that was, how it rotted my soul and caused me to see myself and others in the light of our failures rather than in the light of our Savior, I found it difficult to help others see it. I remember so clearly a conversation where I tried to explain to someone with a deeply judgmental spirit that their perspective is one possible view out of several possible views. They looked at me and said, “so you don’t believe in absolute truth?” Did you hear that? If you question my perspective, you must be questioning truth itself. I have always loved this line from G. K. Chesterton: “It is not bigotry to be certain we are right; but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong.”

Every time I am tempted to think of myself as better than, higher than, nobler than...I need only to recount the tales of the saints who have gone before us. Or those saintly men and women who walk among us. And if that doesn’t put us in our place, consider Jesus Christ who is our standard. We will see ourselves as men and women of unclean lips—even as we dwell among a people of similarly unclean lips (Isaiah 6). Avoid being hypercritical.

Second, avoid being *hypocritical*. Why, asks Jesus, would you point out a speck, or a wood chip, in your brother’s eye, when you are walking around with a huge 4x4 wooden plank sticking out of your own eye? It’s hypocritical, of course. It’s foolish, of course. But on a practical level, it’s like a blind surgeon trying to do eye surgery. Would you sign up for that?



In late October 2017, a pilot at Chicago Midway airport decided to play a halloween prank on all the people milling around the airport. He put on some dark glasses and carried around a white and orange cane pretending to be a blind pilot. All the stewards at the gate were in on the joke, pretending to help him find his way to the right gate so he could pilot the plane. I love this picture because it belongs forever pasted by Matthew 7. In Luke's parallel sermon, Jesus inserts this line right in the middle of this discussion: "can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they both not fall into a pit?" (Luke 6:39).

Judging makes us blind. It makes us blind, says Bonhoeffer, because "when I judge, I am blind to my own evil and to the grace granted the other person. But in the love of Christ, disciples know about every imaginable kind of guilt and sin, because they know of the suffering of Jesus Christ." Every single person I want to judge is like me: a sinner in need of God's forgiveness.

And that brings me to the third thing Jesus challenges here. Not just the hypercritical; not just the hypocritical. But also just the *critical*. It's easy and common to read this passage like this: "well, as long as I'm not cheating my my spouse, I pay my taxes, I tell people the truth, and I bake pies for my neighbors then I can do my main job, which is pointing out my brothers faults. Remove the beam, avoid hypocrisy, then you can go about your job of naming the speck you see in another."

But we know, don't we, that every line in the Sermon on the Mount is meant to bring us to our knees. If we think we check the box, we prove we haven't read it right. In John 9, Jesus heals a man who was blind from birth, giving him the right for the very first time to enter the temple. And while this man is now able to see holy things in holy places, the Pharisees and religious teachers of the law are only able to see a threat to their authority and power, and an opportunity to condemn Jesus. "Give glory to God," they say to the formerly blind man, "we know this man is a sinner." "Whether he is a sinner or not," he replies, "I do not know. But one thing I know, I once was blind, but now I see" (John 9).

You and I didn't remove the beam from our eyes. We couldn't. Christ alone gives sight to the blind. And haven't you noticed in the gospels, it's the bigoted, self-righteous scribes and pharisees who want to point out every speck, while those healed of their blindness wish only to proclaim that Christ has made us see?

In Luke's parallel sermon, Jesus simply says "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37).

Jesus challenges not just those who judge too much, or those who judge deceitfully; but those whose spiritual stun gun is set on judgmental condemnation. He is talking about those of us who assume the Judgment seat is ours in the first place.

We, writes the Apostle Paul, must all appear before the judgment seat of *Christ* (2 Cor 5:10). On that day *God* will judge the secrets of men (Rom 2:16). After all, it is he and he alone who has been charged with the task to judge the *living and* the dead (2 Tim 4:1). And the gospel declares this amazing, good news: that in Christ, God has already judged sin in the flesh, and he has judged you and me faithful on the basis of Christ's finished work. You and me...judged...faithful? You and me—sinners in the hands of a gracious Savior. Christians don't judge others because any judgment that needs to be made later will be made later by him; any judgment that needs to be made here and now has already been made. There is none righteous, no not one. Christians are not high and mighty; just forgiven. When we see evil, the proper response is not righteous indignation as the holy ones who hold our nose at the unholy ones. It is to confess that we are so full of sin it's not even funny. When we see hurting in others, our response is not to figure out to whom we ought to point the finger other than to ourselves: for we are the hands of feet of Jesus. The question is not "who is to blame for this?", but rather "what can I do to help you in this?"

### A CENTRAL TEACHING

There are very few sayings of Jesus that reappear in Paul's writings. Paul didn't know Jesus in his earthly life. He met him in his heavenly form on the road to Damascus. The gospels had not been written yet, so the "sayings" of Jesus as we know them in the gospels are rarely found in any of Paul's letters. When they do appear, we can know they must have been so central to Christian life and thought that they were being shared freely and widely before any gospel writer wrote them down. For example, Paul quotes Jesus as saying, "freely you have received; freely give." That formed the basis of Paul's admonition for Christians to be giving people.

So it's remarkable that this judgment passage of Matthew 7:1 appears in Paul's letter to the Romans:

"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things" (Rom 2:1)

Paul, aware that this teaching comes from the lips of Jesus himself, uses it to form the basis for how Christians treat one another on hot-button issues and high-stakes confrontations. It's in Romans 14. In 23 verses, Paul uses the phrase "pass judgment"

5 times, and every time says “don’t do it!” They accept a longer menu than you do? Fine. Don’t eat the food you have conscience issues about, but leave them alone! They think celebrating a feast day or a holiday is inappropriate and you think it’s the best thing since sliced bread? No problem. Enjoy your holiday get-together, but don’t make a big deal out of it in a way that hurts or belittles your brother. Just chill! We are brothers! We are sisters! We are supposed to be each other’s biggest fans. And never forget this: brothers we are, but parents we are not. Listen to Paul:

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”

So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom 14:10-12)

We have a Judge, says Paul, he’s the Chief Judge, and he is *not* me.

James, the Lord’s brother, knows this to be a central teaching of Christ as well. “Don’t grumble against one another, brothers,” he writes, “so that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door” (James 5:9).

### **BELIEVE THE BEST**

Imagine the great relief that can flood your soul when you realize that God the Judge—who knows everything about every situation—will Judge. He will judge justly. He will judge correctly. So you and I don’t have to. This truth can free us to believe the best.

Peter was in the wrong. It was the last Supper, and Jesus had just told them that one of them would betray him. Rather than searching his own heart for the instinct and impulses that would cause Peter to deny Christ just a few hours later, Peter and the rest of the group began a debate about who was the greatest among them. And Jesus looked at Peter. He didn’t say to him, “I’ve sized you up. I know what you are thinking and I judge you as evil and wicked.” No. He said, “Simon, Satan desires to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you recover, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 21:31-32). Jesus says, “my deep judgment is not against you but the devil within you. My assessment of you is rooted in hope: that you can overcome this by the power of God. That even if and when you give in to the temptation in your life, there can be—indeed there will be—a bright future for you when you rise from the darkness and are useful for a powerful ministry.”

Hear the challenge from the sermon that was meant to change the world. Could we see others as Christ sees others? Could we invest in others our greatest hopes, rather than



burdening them with our greatest fears? When we hear people talking about the girl at Wal-Mart with the twelve piercings in odd places, will we be the ones to respond with “oh, I love her! You’re talking about Terry, right? The one with the 3 year-old who lives over on Jennifer Lane? She’s been on my prayer list for three weeks and I haven’t spoken to her since she came over for dinner with our small group last month. How do you know her?”

When we walk into a room where everyone is listing all the ways the culture is deteriorating (“why just last week we found out Starbucks on Main street has 3 gay baristas, so I’ll never shop there again”), will we be the ones to say, “how can we find a ministry in this town that can teach...US...how to better understand, how to better love, how to better minister to such people, so that when we invite them more deeply into our own lives, they will feel more wanted, more appreciated, more loved than they have ever been loved before?”

Could we see others first—not as cultural statistics but as future members of this church? Not as problems but as potential? Could we see others as our brothers and sisters in humanity, fellow image bearers of God deeply in need of a love greater than they have ever known that can transform them the same way it has transformed me?

Only if we first see ourselves as Christ sees us. Can I let you in on a little secret? My God made you. He bought you. He died for you. And all those mistakes that you replay in your mind? He saw them. He was there when you committed them. But he does not remember them. For he has removed your sins as far as the east is from the west. And if Christ could do that for us, what could we offer the world?