

Introduction

Interestingly, from the words of Jesus in Matthew 7.1-5, we learn that judging others is both discouraged and encouraged. It is discouraged in one sense and encouraged in another. The practice of judging others can be good and it can be bad. So today, I want to consider both senses, starting with the negative and moving from there to the positive. As we read the text, look for both aspects.

Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ 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? ⁴ 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? ⁵ 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.

1A. Judging judgmentally is discouraged

We can discuss two things from verses 1 and 2 of this text: we can give a definition (or description) of the judgmental spirit with some explanation, then we can carefully weigh the direction that Jesus gives for us to avoid this sin.

1B. Definition/description

Defining a sin goes a long way toward helping us avoid it. Thus, some time spent here is time well spent. For a definition of the judgmental spirit we need to focus on the emphatic opening, “judge not” (v. 1a).

This is a command of Christ by which He condemns censoriousness or a judgmental spirit. Censoriousness is the disposition to think about and speak about others in an uncharitable way. To help us expand on the meaning of censoriousness and its opposite we can draw again from Jonathan Edwards (*Charity and its Fruits*, Chapter X, “The Spirit of Charity, the Opposite of a Censorious Spirit,” based on 1 Co 13.5, “Charity ... thinks no evil”). Summarizing Edwards in our own words, we can define censoriousness as an unloving, uncharitable, unmerciful, unbalanced, harsh, and hypocritical evaluation of other people regarding their status before God, their character, and their actions. Trying to define, we can make three remarks.

1) In the first place, the judgmental spirit is the tendency to condemn other professing Christians as hypocrites and to do so for all the wrong reasons. Classically, the supposed friends of Job condemned him because of the severity of his trials and afflictions. We probably all tend to think this way about afflictions whether they are our own or the afflictions of others. We wrongly infer from deep outward affliction to deep inward unrighteousness. In doing this, we assume that we can look into the hearts of others where only God can see.

There are many causes for this spirit. We may judge harshly because of some hurt inflicted on us, because of envy, because of spiritual immaturity, or because of our own spiritual pride by which we make our religious experience the standard that we impose on others.

2) In the second place, the judgmental spirit involves playing down the good character traits of someone and accenting the bad character traits, any bad traits that it can possibly find. It is searching as on a mission, searching for the negative. The censorious person will not attempt to balance between the good and bad qualities of the person that he judges harshly.

Often the censorious person will form a negative judgment based on hearsay, with no effort to get the full picture, and with a tendency to believe any rumors flying around. As Edwards puts it, the judgmental spirit delights to hear about the evil of others; it is greedy to hear rumors that put the conduct of so and so in the worst possible light.

By contrast, the Psalmist says that the godly person who dwells on God's holy hill, “takes not up a reproach against his neighbor” (Ps. 15.3).

Obviously, censorious thinking is the exact opposite of love that thinks no evil about others but shows charity, mercy, forgiveness, and balance while covering a multitude of sins.

3) Finally, the judgmental spirit has a comparative component to it. Jesus stresses the point of comparative judgment in our text. He depicts the radical inconsistency that is bedfellow with censoriousness. The inconsistency pertains to our looking at others and our speaking to them (vs. 3-4, **why do you see...how can you say...**). However and here is the main point, we do this with glaring and monumental inconsistency. It is done while taking no notice of one's own sins, while overlooking the large wooden beam in one's own eye! ("**you...do not notice the log that is in your own eye**").

The judgmental spirit is clearly a great sin of the heart and mind, of contemplation, of dwelling on the sins of others. Thus, it involves magnifying sawdust particles out of due proportion, of accenting negatives, and thinking the worst. There is a significant lesson in the contrast between the particle of sawdust and the log or beam. We overlook this point too often. The truth that each of us should say of ourselves is this, "I am in fact guilty of more sins than I see in others, and what I see in others in no way matches what God sees and knows of my sins."

The comparison of speck and log is perception oriented. It is a comparison of what you perceive in others and what you are in reality yourself (and can see in yourself if you do not hide from yourself or place yourself behind your back as Augustine did). We cannot see the motives of the hearts of others and though we have difficulty being true to ourselves, we can see our own motives in light of Scripture. We cannot see most of the sinful deeds of others; we are not there but we are present when we sin ourselves. We witness each and every sin we commit.

Thus, by comparison what we can see of our sins of heart, word, and deed is far greater than what we can see of the sins of others. Therefore, it is a monstrous and shameful inconsistency to overlook the greater in ourselves while we emphasize the lesser in others! Then we simply add fuel to the fire when we move from looking, seeing, and thinking to speaking about the sins of others. Moreover, it is quite audacious for us to go to someone, anyone, and say, "I see that you are a dirty rotten sinner, so let me help you and guide you spiritually."

Censoriousness, the judgmental spirit, that we are commanded to avoid (7.1a, **judge not**) is a harsh and unloving evaluation of others that we formulate in the mind's eye but with impaired vision.

2B. Direction

The direction that Jesus gives is this: "In light of God's judgment, judge yourself." It contains two points (consequence and self-examination).

1) First, Jesus directs us to consider the consequence of the judgmental spirit. **Judge not, that you be not judged.** ² **For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.** These are strong words. The harshness of our judgments regarding others sets the tone as to the judgment we will receive from God. The measuring tape, the rule, or standard that we use to judge others is the one that the Lord will use to judge us. Plainly, if we have no forgiveness in our hearts toward others, if we are rigid and unbalanced in the posture we take toward our neighbors, then we evidence the fact that we have no forgiveness before the judgment bar of God. Put another way, we should say, "If we do not battle against a judgmental and censorious spirit with acknowledgment of this sin in our lives, then we ask for an unbending and harsh judgment for ourselves from God."

This fact is an astounding motivation that discourages judging judgmentally. It coordinates with verses we have discussed earlier regarding how we should pray according to the 5th petition: forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us (Mat 6.12). It goes with the powerful "if...then" of Matthew 6.14-15: **For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,** ¹⁵ **but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.** If we remember that our severity toward others dictates severity from the Lord toward us, then we have motivating cause to avoid this sin in earnest.

2) Second, He then directs us to exercise some serious self-examination

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.

A hearty self-examining spirit works wonders against a censorious spirit. The key is to acknowledge the plank/log/telephone-pole nature of our sins before the Lord as a glass through which we always look when we view the conduct and sins of others. We need to remember our sins, look at them, ponder them, and act upon them in confession and repentance clinging to the Lord Jesus for forgiveness (knowing that our sins in fact merit eternal punishment).

We must not dwell on them in despairing retrospection. Instead, we must see them under the blood of our great high priest who secured access for us into the holy places (Heb.10.19-21). In this context, with a sense of forgiveness we have received in place first, then, and then only, are we to allow our eyes to behold the sins of others. When we view the conduct of others with this mindset, it will be impossible to play up their sins while downplaying our own sins. By going in this self-examining direction, we crush censoriousness to powder.

In general and in summary, we can say that restraint of this sin of the heart will come when we fill our hearts with the right kind of thoughts instead of dwelling on the sins and shortcomings of others. Restraint will come by dwelling on the liberty of the Spirit in sanctifying His people in His own ways and times, our inability to see the heart, our lack of knowledge, and our own sinfulness.

So far, we have covered the discouragement to judging judgmentally (definition aids avoiding and so does looking at God's judgment and our own sins). Now we can shift from the negative to the positive side of the equation.

2A. Judging justly is encouraged

I want to list a number of things briefly that justify the notion of judging justly, and then we will consider the principles of this passage that encourage and govern just judging.

1B. Justification for just judging

Here are some pieces of evidence that support the claim that there is such a thing as just judging: 1) in Matthew 7.5, Jesus tells us to look to ourselves first but afterwards we are then in position to **"take the speck out of your brother's eye."** This action involves making the judgment that someone has a speck-like *sin* in his or her eye. 2) According to Matthew 7.6, we are duty bound to make the judgment that some people are dogs and swine in their behavior. 3) We must evaluate and conclude that some people are false prophets per Matthew 7.15. 4) Church discipline (Mat. 18.15-20) presupposes just judgment as does 5) the eye for an eye principle in the civil courts (Mat 5.38-39). 6) Finally, Jesus clearly said we are to just with right, righteous, or just judgment and not by appearances (Jo 7.24, **"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment"**).

2B. Principles of just judging

In contrast to censoriousness, three simple points guide us in judging justly. Proper judging of others will be reluctant, moderate, and tender.

1) Reluctance

If we are judgmental, we will find satisfaction in discovering faults and speaking about them. However, when we remember our own sin and the mercy we have in Christ, we may be able to see the sins of others more clearly, but we will be reluctant to take the initiative to do so. In this connection, we will display deliberateness, hesitancy, and reluctance.

We will not rush to judgment in any way, shape, or form.

2) Moderation

Censoriousness involves forming exaggerated conclusions with impaired vision. However, when we judge ourselves first in a primary way then our perspective is clear and we can make moderate and balanced judgments without exaggeration.

3) Tenderness

Recall that the censorious spirit is harsh and callous. By it we hurt other people in a pretense of piety. Thus, we tend to miss the difference between the comparative smallness of our neighbor's sins in relation to the largeness of our own sins. However, we should give special attention to the location of the speck of sawdust in the illustration used by Jesus. The speck of sawdust is in the other person's *eye*. There is a foreign element in the neighbor's eye. It hurts and harms him. There is need to remove it and it is unloving to leave it there. How, however, do we take something out of someone's eye? We do this kind of thing very tenderly. The censorious person grabs a rough cloth, even steel wool to take out a speck of sawdust from someone's eye!

In the strongest way of contrast, the loving Christian will be delicate and tender. He will be gentle in dealing with the sins of others.

There are three good friends for occasions where we must try to help others deal with the sin that hurts and harms them (where love calls for it): reluctance, moderation, and tenderness.

Conclusion

Three things call for comment in conclusion.

1) So much of the Sermon on the Mount is relational

Jesus applies the Law and calls for good works that glorify God repeatedly in the context of relationships. Our relationship to others is vital to our relationship with God. Christianity is fully a religion of the heart before God, as to how our heart attitudes play out in relation to others. Judging unjustly and censoriously is another case in point (it is the major point of this text with judging justly as an important but minor point here).

2) Godly relationships require an important perspective

Christians cannot live as islands unto themselves. We sin against each other at the same time that we are a blessing to each other. We see the sins of those in the world around us in ways that are sometimes extreme as to what they reveal about the depravity of man.

Nonetheless, the Christian must view all sinners, and especially the sinners of the household of faith, from the perspective of his own sins and the forgiveness he has through the death and resurrection of Christ. (Note the history of redemption justification for assuming this perspective because believers are now on this side of the resurrection and must interpret the pre-resurrection teachings of Christ in that light; His teachings are like buds that flower in the sunlight of His death and resurrection; the same is true of the buds of the OT).

3) Judging justly will be principled

Therefore (with a healthy perspective driving us), Christians will speak the truth to one another and about one another in love (Eph 4.15; 25-32), but with reluctance, moderation, and tenderness. This applies to all personal relationships (sometimes we may need to give a word of correction) and it especially applies in church discipline issues (sometimes the church has to give a word of correction by due process; this material sets the tone of the due process).

We must have the gentleness of mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters to one another in the context of one-anothering love (cf. 1 Ti 5.1; 2 Ti 2.24-25 & 2 Thess 3.15). Such gentleness will flow from a heart seasoned with the right perspective. This is just another way of talking about the compounding love mentioned by Paul in Romans (12.10). I close with a paraphrase of Christian duty from Romans 12.10 that is not judgmental but just in judging: "Show kind affection toward one another with mutual family love of brothers and sisters."