“The Sermon on the Mount”

“Can Christians Judge Others?

Matthew 7:1-6

One of the biggest misconceptions in the Christian faith is this: we are not permitted to judge others

What is it to judge another person?

It is to “form an opinion or conclusion about” someone (Oxford Dictionary)

This may relate to the person’s looks, attitudes, behavior or motives

It’s become much more prevalent amongst Christians to say we must abstain from ever forming opinions or conclusions regarding other people’s choices

This has increasingly gained traction due to the inordinate attention our society gives to the abhorrence of intolerance

In fact, intolerance has become one of our society’s most scorned vices

Intolerance is “the unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, or behavior that differ from one’s own” (Oxford Dictionary)

There’s an immediate incredible irony in this definition

2

Although our culture champions tolerance as a necessary virtue, it does not generally practice it when it comes to accepting the views of Christianity itself

In other words, Canadian society is tolerant of almost anything except Christianity

Listen to some of the synonyms for intolerance: narrow-mindedness, small-mindedness, dogmatism, prejudice, bias, one-sidedness, unfairness, discrimination, oversensitivity

This is how the majority of Canadians view Christians and what we believe

Now’s it’s also a general rule of life no one wants to be an object of contempt

We long for acceptance, to be liked, to be seen favorably in other people’s eyes

I’m mentioning all this to come to this very important point

There is a huge temptation for Bible-believing Christians to soften and even compromise what Scripture teaches which is completely contrary to our society’s way of thinking, e.g. premarital sex, same-sex marriage, every religion is equally valid, abortion is perfectly acceptable

So this prevailing view of practicing tolerance has slowly but surely been seeping into the church environment

3

I’ve heard self-proclaiming Christians use Matthew 7:1 more than once to preach tolerance

“Hey, don’t you know Jesus said we are not to judge others? We can believe what think is right about these moral issues, but we have no right whatsoever to judge others who think differently than us.”

So is this really what Christ taught in Matthew 7:1?

Let’s begin to answer this by asking another basic question

Do we think Christ practiced what He preached?

In other words, if we really believe Christ was saying we should judge no one, is that what He actually practiced in His life?

Let’s go to Matthew 23 to answer this

In this chapter Jesus seems to be giving a conclusive opinion about other people, namely the Pharisees

He calls them hypocrites, blind guides, fools, whitewashed tombs, and vipers

How unjudgmental and accepting does this sound to you?

Christ was clearly judging people and was unquestionably intolerant

Is this chapter just an isolated occurrence of Jesus’ intolerance?

4

Actually not – there’s more

Elsewhere, He said He was the only way to heaven, John 14:6

That’s distinctly intolerant of other world religions

There’s not multiple ways to make it to heaven

The path goes through Him and no one else

On another occasion, when Peter tried to deter Him from willingly going to the cross, He called Peter “Satan”

Let’s turn to Matthew 16:21-26

You may have been called many unflattering, unkind and condescending names but what could possibly be worse than this?

It’s harshly judgmental in every way

Now, here’s one more example

It’s found in Luke 9:18-21

Jesus did not say it was completely okay for His disciples to be tolerant of everyone’s opinion

There was only one right answer and Peter proclaimed it

I’m building a case because I want us to see with obvious clarity Jesus wasn’t tolerant – He undeniably judged others

5

We also believe Christ was and is the perfect Son of God

He could commit no sin

1 Peter 2:22 verifies this when it says, “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.”

Because Christ was perfectly holy, He could not contradict His own teaching

If we take this verse to mean judging isn’t permissible whatsoever, we also have to say He knowingly violated it

But’s that’s not even remotely possible

So how are we to interpret this verse?

We must interpret it contextually, not in isolation

This is a vitally important aspect of biblical interpretation

Be very careful not to proof text what you claim to believe with isolated verses

Always compare Scripture with Scripture

Here’s an example regarding one can easily build false doctrines on a single verse of Scripture

1 Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

This verse gives us information on theology and Christology

6

It plainly states there is one God

So should we conclude true religion is monotheistic and God is not triune?

No, because other verses of Scripture substantiate the fact God is three in one

Genesis 1:1-2, 26; Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14

One can also easily take what the apostle Paul wrote in this verse in total isolation and quickly come to the conclusion Christ was only a man

After all, that’s what the verse says, doesn’t it?

The Greek word for men and Man is the same – “Anthropos”

However, the overall teaching within the New Testament unequivocally points to Jesus being the divine God-man

Matthew 1:23; John 1:1; 5:18; 10:30; 20:28; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:8

Paul’s emphasis on Jesus being a man in 1 Timothy 2:5 centres around the necessity of Jesus being human to be a mediator between people and God the Father

He had to die on the cross as a human sacrifice to mediate and restore peace between God and us

7

This in no way speaks against Christ’s divinity

False teaching is almost always based upon proof texting, taking verses in isolation and establishing a doctrinal belief upon one verse

I took much time already today to interpret Matthew 7:1 in a much broader biblical setting

Now we need to interpret this verse in its more immediate context

As we unwrap Christ’s teaching on judging, these will be our main points of consideration

Verse one is only speaking against improper judging

To improperly judge immediately invokes a heavenly response

Improper judging greatly elevates the faults of others while hugely minimizing or ignoring one’s own

Proper judging can be practiced following honest self-introspection, repentance and a personal commitment to change

This week let’s consciously evaluate how we are judging others

8

Christ is only referring to wrong judging in verse one

He is not obliterating the simple practice of judging altogether

John 7:24: “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

The NIV says, “Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.”

Christ cannot contradict himself

He is actually instructing His followers to actively judge others righteously

Therefore, Matthew 7:1 is not a call to eliminate judging

How do we improperly judge?

“We break this command when we think the worst of others… when we only speak to others of their faults…when we judge an entire life only by its worst moments…when we judge others without considering ourselves in their same circumstances… when we judge others without being mindful that we ourselves will be judged.” (David Guzik, BLB)

We tend to quickly jump to wrong conclusions before we have all the facts

9

A woman was waiting at an airport one night. With several long hours before her flight. She hunted for a book in the airport shop, bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop. She was engrossed in her book, but happened to see, that the man beside her, as bold as could be, grabbed a cookie or two from the bag between, which she tried to ignore, to avoid a scene. She read, munched cookies, and watched the clock, as the gutsy "cookie thief!" diminished her stock. She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by thinking, "If I wasn't so nice, I'd blacken his eye!" With each cookie she took, he took one, too. When only one was left, she wondered what he'd do. With a smile on his face and a nervous laugh, He took the last cookie and broke it in half. He offered her half, as he ate the other. She snatched it from him and thought, "Oh brother, this guy has some nerve, and he's also rude, why, he didn't even show any gratitude!" She had never known when she had been so galled, and sighed with relief when her flight was called. She gathered her belongings and headed for the gate, refusing to look back at the "thieving ingrate." She boarded the plane and sank in her seat, then sought her book, which was almost complete. As she reached in her baggage, she gasped with surprise. There was her bag of cookies in front of her eyes! "If mine are here," she moaned with despair, "Then the others were his and he tried to share!" Too late to apologize, she realized with grief, that she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief! (sermonsearch.com)

10

The way we judge wrongly most frequently is by evaluating others with the wrong motives

To make ourselves look or feel better than someone else

By pointing out other’s sins without really caring for their soul

We judge with the intention of proving guilt but not seeking restoration and renewal

By constantly critiquing others so we can safely remain in a position of control over them

However, recognize this!

As soon as we improperly judge, heaven gets involved

God notices and He will immediately or ultimately bring justice and retribution in equal measure

Proverbs 5:21: “For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders all his paths.”

Proverbs 15:3: “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.”

Nothing escapes God’s attention, including our wrong judgments of others

If we really believe this, it will be a deterrent for us to misjudge others

11

We seem to be much too oblivious to the fact there’s coming a time when we will solitarily face God’s judgment

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

Matthew 12:36-37: “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Romans 14:10-12: “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 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 shall give account of himself to God.”

Hebrews 4:13: “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

Having quoted these numerous verses, permit me to emphasize this

We’re way more generous to casually judge ourselves and harshly judge ourselves, forgetting the divine appointment we will eventually and inevitably experience before God

12

Given the fact God’s tracking how people improperly judge others, it is essential we take this very seriously

As a consequence, some may say this is another huge reason why they don’t want to judge anyone about anything because they may judge wrongly

Furthermore, there’s also these lines of reasoning as to why we prefer to interpret Matthew 7:1 in isolation, abolishing judging completely

We don’t want to be judged by anyone else since it may necessitate having to reject the sinful ways we’re living, and we don’t want to judge others since we fear they may reject us

Additionally, aren’t we called as Christians to share our unconditional love with others anyway?

How can I judge others if I supposed to unconditionally loving them at all times?

It’s not loving to question someone else’s faith or their moral choices

Thinking like this is to incorrectly confuse love with acceptance

We are called to give unconditional love but not unconditional approval

It is impossible to actually love someone without judging them

13

If everyone was perfect, then obviously judging would be unnecessary

But we are very much imperfect and sinful and therefore do things which are harmful, both to ourselves and others

Therefore, judging others with the right motives is actually anything but unloving since it is desiring what is best, what brings spiritual, mental, and emotional health to a person’s life

So let’s be honest, some people use the “unconditional love” argument as a copout, a way to play it safe, a way to avoid being rejected or losing a relationship

The truth is we’re not to judge wrongly but we are to judge rightly

This is an obligation on both sides of the coin

However, this important question requires an answer?

I know how easily it is for me to judge improperly, so how can I overcome this?

We must practice honest self-introspection before judging others

Jesus points to this necessity in verses three through five

To do so He utilizes a literary technique so those listening will never forget the important truth He is communicating to them

We will examine this next Sunday

2 Samuel 12:1-7 – This is the story of King David’s hypocrisy and rush to judge someone else’s sin

Mark 14:3-9 – This is the story of the woman who was wrongly judged for anointing Christ with expensive oil

Luke 18:9-14 – This is the parable of the Pharisee who hypocritically judged the tax collector when they came up to the temple to worship

John 8:1-7 – This is the story of the woman who was caught in adultery by the hypocritical, judgmental Pharisees

James 1:19,20 gives us these practical principles: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

In his little book Illustrations of Bible Truth, H.A. Ironside pointed out the folly of judging others. He related an incident in the life of a man called Bishop Potter. "He was sailing for Europe on one of the great transatlantic ocean liners. When he went on board, he found that another passenger was to share the cabin with him. After going to see the accommodations, he came up to the purser's desk and inquired if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables in the ship's safe. He explained that ordinarily he never availed himself of that privilege, but he had been to his cabin and had met the man who was to occupy the other berth. Judging from his appearance, he was afraid that he might not be a very trustworthy person. The purser accepted the responsibility for the valuables and remarked, 'It's all right, bishop, I'll be very glad to take care of them for you. The other man has been up here and left his for the same reason!'" (sermonillustrations.com)

Before we are too harsh in judging those scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day, let's stop and look at ourselves. All too many Christians today go to church to find fault, to gossip, and to criticize. Warren Wiersbe, in his book *Angry People*, wrote, an incident in the life of Joseph Parker, the great British preacher, illustrates this tragic truth. He was preaching at the City Temple in London. After the service one of the listeners came up to him and said, 'Dr. Parker, you made a grammatical error in your sermon.' He then proceeded to point out the error to the pastor. Joseph Parker looked at the man and said, 'And what else did you get out of the message?' What a fitting rebuke!" (sermonsearch.com)