

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday,  
September 11, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

### MATTHEW 7:1-6

1 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

6 “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

### THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD’S KINGDOM #29 THE CURE FOR A CRITICAL SPIRIT

We’ve all been there. Most of us can recall the events like they happened yesterday. The judgmental looks, the harsh words, the feelings of guilt, the loneliness, and the pain that accompanied all of it were awful.

Judgment. The very word conjures up images of courtrooms, piety, not measuring up, a lack of love. No one likes to be judged. No one. We might sign up for it – a piece of art in an art show, an entry in a forensics competition, a sporting event that ends with judges’ scores. Yes, these are judgments that we invite. But, there are judgments that we’ve all received that we neither invited nor particularly wanted. And, brutal honesty requires us to admit that we’ve all placed ourselves in the judge’s chair in a moment of weakness, often times resulting in hurting others in some perverted attempt to make ourselves feel better about who we are.

Richard DeHaan, in his book, *Men Sent From God*, lists the following criticisms that pastors sometimes are on the receiving end of. “If the pastor is young, they say he lacks experience. If his hair is gray, he is too old for the young people. If he has five or six children, he is irresponsible; if he has no children, he is setting a bad example. If he uses a lot of illustrations, he neglects the Bible; if he does not use enough, he is not relevant. If he condemns wrong deeds, he’s cranky; if he does not, he’s compromising. If he drives an old car, he shames his congregation; if he drives a new one, he’s setting his affection on earthly things.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway books, 2001), p. 228.

It's written in "tongue in cheek" fashion, but DeHaan makes the point well. Criticism is part of life in the public square. And, it's not just pastors. Opinion polls drive campaign strategies for politicians. Job reviews have a direct bearing on how some of us perform in our occupations. Batting averages are debated by sports fans and a team's won/loss percentage is an indicator if that team is worthy of having fans or not.

If enough film critics give a movie a bad review, chances are good that the film will tank at the box office. The same is true in the worlds of literature and art. Some of you have the hair style you have or wear the clothes that you do because of criticism about how you looked at prior to that hair style or the particular brand of clothing that you now wear. Criticism is part and parcel to life as a human being.

Some of us fancy ourselves as good judges of character. Others of us are forced into the role of judge because our occupation requires us to perform job reviews or make judgments on any number of things. It's possible that we have a judge or a former judge in our worship services today. There are some here today who believe that they have the gift of constructive criticism. It is your lot in life to tell others how they might perform just a little bit better at whatever task it is that they are a part of. Often times the person who gives the constructive criticism is the worst at receiving it, believing that they have it all figured out and there is no room left for growth in their life.

When it comes to judgment, I suppose we all have a viewpoint on how we which side of the court we'd like to be sitting on.

In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Kent Hughes shares a delightful story about a young bachelor. "Every time he brought a prospective wife home, his mother criticized her unmercifully. The young man was at his wit's end when a friend offered this advice: 'Find someone like your mother.' So he looked and looked until he found a clone. She looked like his mother, her gait was like his mother's, she talked like his mother, and she even thought like his mother. It was amazing! So he took her home. The next time he saw the friend who had given the advice and was asked how his mother like the girl, the bachelor answered, 'It went great. My mother loved her, but my father couldn't stand her.'"<sup>2</sup>

The Bible is full of talk about judgment. From Genesis through Revelation you can read about the judgment of God. We read about crime and punishment. We read about the judgment seat of Christ. We read about the consequences of sin. We read about the wisdom of King Solomon and the way that he judged the nation of Israel. There is even an entire book of the Bible called, *Judges*, which chronicles the days in which Israel was ruled by righteous judges. So you might think, people of God have every right to judge. After all, we are created in the image of God, and one of the roles that God plays is that of judge. If that's what you think, you couldn't be further off.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

As He was coming to a conclusion in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus began to give some very practical application to His listeners. It's not unlike many sermons that are preached today. It's not uncommon for a pastor to teach doctrinal truth and send the congregation away with a few ways to apply that truth to their everyday lives. As chapter seven of Matthew's Gospel begins we read the following words from Jesus.

1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

#### **I. Take Yourself Off of the Judgment Seat (vs. 1, 2)**

The first principle that Jesus teaches us in this section of the Sermon on the Mount is that we need to take ourselves off of the judgment seat.

Look again at verse one: 1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

Anybody who has been in the position of being judged breathes a sigh of relief at Jesus' words. There is no room for questioning here. We, as Christians, do not have the right to judge, period.

Now before we go too far with this, let me be clear that Jesus is not saying that Christians are to suspend their duty to be critical thinkers. There are some Christians that I know who use this verse as the excuse to not stand up for anything. The chancellor at my university used to say, "If you don't stand for something you'll fall for anything." I know pastors who refuse to preach on sin because they think that preaching on sin is too judgmental.

Christ isn't telling Christians to suspend their critical thinking. He is imploring us not to become hypercritical jerks.

Here is why I say that he isn't telling us that we are never to judge. In Matthew 7 alone, there are two verses which encourage us be critical thinkers. We've already read verse six today.

6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

You cannot live by the principles of verse six if you are incapable of identifying the “dogs” and the “pigs” in your world. This requires us to make a judgment on the types of people to whom we will not give what is sacred.

Verse 15 of Matthew 7 says: 15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Again, the reader is forced to make a judgment as to that which is being taught.

A year ago we studied 1 John. In 1 John 4:1 we read, “1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Remember, the issue is not one of critical thinking. We are to make judgments over what is right and wrong. When an action is antithetical to that which Christ has called us to, we have a responsibility to hold our brothers and sisters in Christ accountable to a higher standard. But, we mustn’t be petty! We must recognize that there are issues that Christians have disagreed on for centuries. None of us has our theology 100% correct.

Kent Hughes writes, “There is a universe of difference between being discerningly critical and hypercritical. A discerning spirit is constructive. A hypercritical spirit is destructive. The person with a destructive, overcritical spirit revels in criticism for its own sake. He expects to find fault . . . One of the most prominent characteristics of this critical, fault-finding person is that he predictably focuses on things that are of little importance and treats them as matters of vital importance . . . this pettiness on secondary issues is condemned in Romans 14 in the strongest of terms.

1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. 2 One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Paul adds in another passage:

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

We set the standard and tone for our own final judgment by our judgmental conduct in life. And we prove by our judging of others that we know what is right. So if we do not do what is right, we condemn ourselves. . . if we set ourselves up as authorities and judges over others, we should not be surprised or complain when we are judged by our own standard. “2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be

measured to you” (Matthew 7:2). We need to face and apply this text with all its fearful force.”<sup>3</sup>

Friends, every one of us will one day appear before the throne of God. The Bible speaks of two judgments at the end of time – the judgment where the sheep will be separated from the goats, which is called the Great White Throne Judgment and the Judgment Seat of Christ where Christians will be rewarded for the life we live. I mentioned Bruce Wilkinson’s great little book, *A Life God Rewards*, when preaching on pursuing lasting treasure a few weeks back. Matthew 7:2 makes it clear that we will be judged by the way that we judge others. That is why we do not belong on the judgment seat. We need to recognize that grace that Christ bestowed upon us and treat others with honor and respect. Cure number one for a critical spirit is to take yourself off the judgment seat. Don’t suspend your critical thinking skills. Don’t start calling that which Christ calls an abomination, “Okay.” But, don’t be hypercritical over petty issues either.

## II. Rise Above Hypocrisy (vs. 3, 4)

Cure number two for a critical spirit is to rise above hypocrisy. Look again at verses 3-4.

3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?”

Those of you who have done any kind of woodworking will no doubt relate to the imagery that Jesus uses here. If you work around saws long enough, you will eventually get a piece of sawdust in your eye. I remember a time a while back when I was working on a project in our garage without the benefit of protective goggles. As I was sawing, a microscopic piece of sawdust lodged itself in my eye. Immediately my eye began tearing up. I had to stop my job. I went inside and flushed the eye with water, but it seemed like no matter how much I tried, I could not get that little speck of sawdust out. Has that ever happened to you? In my case it took Cyndi looking in my eye and finding the sawdust and helping me to get it out.

Some of our translations use the word, “log” instead of the word “plank” that we have in verse 3. Imagine what it would be like to have a log lodged inside of your eye. I found a few pictures on the Internet this week that demonstrate the analogy. (Show 5 Pictures)

If it were possible to have a log lodged into our eye, we would not just be dealing with a minor irritant, we would be blinded. Jesus is showing us that in our hypocrisy, many of us have blinded ourselves to the true condition of our heart. We, who are dealing with our own sin, have no right to be hypercritical with the brother or sister who may be struggling with their sin.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 230.

Again, this doesn't mean that we don't confront sin, but when we do it, we do it in love, and after we have dealt with our sin.

Hughes writes, "When King David was at the lowest point morally in his life, having taken Uriah's wife and committing adultery with her, discovering that she was pregnant and then having Uriah murdered, Nathan the prophet told him a story about a rich man with huge flocks of sheep who lived next door to a poor man. The poor man had only one little ewe lamb that he loved like a daughter. But the rich man, not wanting to take a lamb out of his own herds to feed some guests, took that little lamb and slaughtered it. David's response was basically, 'That man deserves to die. He must repay everything fourfold.' Nathan, pointing a prophetic finger at the king, pronounced, 'You are the man.' Forget someone else's speck – look at the log in your own eye, David!

We find it so easy to turn a microscope on another person's sin while we look at ours through the wrong end of a telescope! We use some strong term for someone else's sin but a euphemism for our own. We easily spot a speck of phoniness in another because we have a logjam of it in our own lives. . . Log-toting speck inspectors are hypocrites, says Jesus (v. 5). They do not care about the speck in the other person's eye. All they care about is building themselves up in their own eyes."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus gives us the final cure to a critical spirit in verse five. It's here that we truly begin to see that we are to deal with our own junk before we help our brother or sister deal with theirs.

### III. Deal With Your Own Junk Then Help Your Brother or Sister (vs. 5)

5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

If you like to judge, I have good news for you. You get to judge, but it's not others, it's yourself! When we examine ourselves we begin to see just how much we need God's grace. Jesus begins this final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount in much the same way that he began it. In Matthew 5:3-4 he began the Beatitudes by telling us that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven without first recognizing their spiritual poverty. If you weren't with us at the beginning of this series we saw something spectacular in the Beatitudes. When the blessing is pronounced, like "Blessed are the poor in spirit," the reward is given immediately after. Every time we read, "for theirs is" just before the blessing, the Greek vocabulary says something that our English Bibles have failed to translate. The words should say, "For theirs and theirs only." So, only those who have recognized their spiritual poverty will be given the reward of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3-4 says, "3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

It's only when we see ourselves as we are that we can see others the way that Christ sees them. When we have dealt with our own junk, then we can deal with our brother or sister.

Kent Hughes writes, "The procedure for removing a speck from an eye is very difficult and delicate. There is nothing in the human body more sensitive than the eyes. The instant we touch it, it closes up. What is required in clearing an eye is gentleness, carefulness, patience, and sympathy for the other person. In the spiritual realm, that care is even more delicate, for we are handling a soul – the most sensitive part of a human being. We must be humble, sympathetic, conscious of our own sins, and without condemnation. We need God's mercy. We need to be people who speak the truth in love because the love of God controls us."<sup>5</sup>

That's good advice. You know sometimes the church of Jesus Christ is known more for what we are against than who we are for. Maybe we can help change that. Jesus is for people. He loved this world so much that He died to bridge that gap that our sin has caused between man and God. Let's not widen the gap between those who need Christ and God because of our actions.

As we close I want you to watch this video, entitled, *An Unspoken Plea*. The woman in this video could be your friend, your neighbor, your co-worker, your mother, your sister, your daughter. Watch it and ask, "How am I representing Jesus to those who still haven't experienced His grace?" And remember, we should never expect those who have not experienced Christ's forgiveness to act like a Christian. That's our job. So, get off the judge's seat, rise above hypocrisy and deal with your own junk before you try to help other's deal with theirs.

Video: An Unspoken Plea (3 minutes 11 seconds)

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.