

Judgmentalism

Pastor Levi Penner

March 31, 2019

I don't mean to break up a good thing, but there's a lot here today. And that's a good thing. Today, we're going to look at one of the most quoted/misquoted verses, I think, in the New Testament. That's just my opinion. You'll hear it most often as, "Don't judge me. Don't judge me." And sometimes it's a joke, and sometimes it's serious. And it's often misinterpreted. I'm excited that God has brought this passage to the surface in my own life, that I've had a chance to reflect on this for the past week, as painful as it's been in many moments.

At the beginning of the week, I said to my wife, "I don't judge, do I?" And she laughed like I told a funny joke, which is rare, because I tell a lot of jokes, and she doesn't laugh. I think they're hilarious. But *now* she laughs. So I thought, "Okay, maybe God's speaking to me through my wife, and I have some heart work to do." So I started praying at the beginning of the week, and every day, multiple times throughout the day I would just ask God to open my eyes, open my heart, open *me* up to this passage because it's for *me*, and it's for *you*, it's for *us*, it's for God's people. And despite, perhaps, maybe your first inclination to think, "Well, that's not me! This sermon's going to be a breeze!" We do it more than we think, we really do, and I feel sometimes like a broken record every time I come to God's word and it just strikes me, and I have to say I do this. This is for me. This is speaking to me. And it's important we recognize that every time we come to it. It's speaking to us.

So as I went throughout the week, and I was praying, "God, it's like You just dropped little breadcrumbs all throughout the week, consistently, every day, with more frequency." And I started remembering things. Things were being unearthed. And I wasn't putting particular attention into trying to dredge them up. No. God was just, "Hey Levi, remember that time?" Just causing these memories to burst into view in my mind, and He does answer prayer, and it can be scary sometimes.

One of those memories was when I first went to bible college. I was in maybe my second year, and so no, I'm not a freshman anymore. I've got a whole year under my belt, and first day of classes – well first day of registration, so everybody's registered – we've all unpacked, we've gotten to know each other, played some games, hung out throughout the day, and the sun was setting. And I walked into the dining hall for supper, and this car pulls up, a Volkswagen Jetta, burgundy, I can still see it, burgundy Volkswagen Jetta pulls up. And classic scene: garbage bags smushed up against the windows. It's so full, it's ready to burst. This individual steps out, tattoos and tongue ring and some kind of surfer dude, I don't know. He steps out and he asks me a question that I was like, "Well, that's obvious." But I answered his obvious question, and I moved on.

Now, I should mention my roommate hadn't yet shown up. I was waiting. And I thought, "Do I get a room all to myself? This is going to be awesome – a room all for me! I can go to bed when I want and no one is going to bug me." So anyway, I go in for supper, all 200 of us or whatever, line up around the dining hall. It's chaos, it's loud. But there's one table in particular that's considerably louder. And as the crowd thins a little bit, as people clear their dishes, there's just one fella telling stories, and they seem too vague to be real. And this one phrase keeps popping out, "Back in the day. Back in the day when I played in the band... Back in the day when I worked on this cruise ship... Back in the day when I was skateboarding and had this big skateboarding accident..." And everybody's just hanging on every word of this individual and I'm thinking in my head, "What a fake! What a phony. There's *no way* you've done all those things you say you've done. There's no way."

And I've had enough, so I get up and leave. And I'm like, I'm gonna go to my room to be alone. And I go in there, and I notice some new things in my room. I notice a guitar, I notice a skateboard, and I'm thinking, "What idiot would bring a skateboard to Grand Prairie? Like, Sexsmith/Grand Prairie area in September? It's winter 10 months of the year, gravel roads everywhere. Where are you going to skateboard?" As I'm thinking things over, you'll never guess who burst in the door. That guy who pulled up, that guy who had everyone hanging on his words, that's my roommate! [exclaims] And I had a year with him as my roommate. Got to hear, "Back in the day..." a whole lot more. And I came to know him. I came to know him as an encouragement, as a friend, as a partner in the Gospel who would listen when I needed someone to listen. One of the few grads from that year who stepped out into pastoral ministry right out of the gate, and remained in it, and is doing well. What a gift, what a blessing it was to know Greg Wiebe.

I couldn't have known how wrong I was about him. I could have just as easily missed that if he was someone else's roommate, and carried on in my judgmentalism.

Matthew 7 is our passage today. Matthew 7 verses 1-5. As I start reading it, you're going to recognize it. You may already know it. Matthew 7:

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

"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? 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? 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."

(NIV)

Let's pray.

Father, Your riches are too deep for us, and so You bring them to us. Your holiness is too much for us. It lays us low, but in Your grace and Your mercy and love, You lift us up. You provide for us. You give sight to the blind, and we are all often blind. So Father, today I just ask that you would take the speck out of our eyes, take the beam out of our eyes, that Your word today would strike home. That it would be effective in our lives, that we would let it speak to us, that we would open up our hearts. We would not try to rationalize and we would not try to qualify any judgmentalism which exists in our own hearts and minds, Lord. That we would be open to Your scalpel as You operate and remove what lingers, what shouldn't be there, and allow the Gospel to have a transforming effect once again on our hearts, Lord. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

As followers of Jesus, we are warned and we're commanded, in fact, not just warned, we're commanded not to judge. Don't do it. Don't do it. Because Jesus knows something. He knows it will hurt us. He knows it. And He has something better for us. Our judgments are often malicious, they're disproportionate, and they're self-centered. Rather, we are called to judge and evaluate ourselves. Only then will we see clearly enough to live transparent and effective lives.

Why is it so important that we not judge? Why is it so important? Well, judging is one of those "super-sins." It doesn't wear a cape, but it does masquerade as something else. It puts on the clothes of righteousness. It walks around acting and pretending, doing a convincing job, much of the time, of being righteousness. It pretends to be holiness, and maybe it even makes us feel holy. Maybe it even makes us feel that way; it can feel authentic. Sometimes, it pops up, oftentimes, as "discernment." It's a discernment, and so it feels like we have this right to it. This duty, this obligation that we're being discerning. It's a *gift* now. At best, it goes unnoticed. At worst, it's elevated and misconstrued as something good. But Jesus knows something. Jesus knows it will hurt us. He knows it will hurt us.

See, judging creates this culture. "Do not judge or you, too, will be judged." Judging creates this cyclical culture, where I judge and I judge everything. It's an external thing, and it continues to move, and I judge everything I see, everyone I see, and I don't really notice it. I'm judging by appearances. I'm driving down the road and that truck in front of me that's going so slow, merging onto the Henday, I'm so mad. Why isn't he speeding up? Doesn't he know the speed limit? And I move to, "What is wrong with him? Something *must* be wrong with him." And I pull up beside and I look over to make sure he knows I see him and I know something's wrong with him. Doesn't he know the speed limit?! That nice truck, but learn to drive!

It invades all of our moments. It does. It does. It's based on appearances. It's based on the surface. It's based on a look, a glance, and it happens so fast, we don't even really see it. We pass someone by, standing on the median with a cardboard sign: "Help. I need food." "Now, what did you do to get yourself in that situation?" is my first thought. My first thought, "What did you do?" It happens so fast. It's external. It's not restorative. That's another element: it's not restorative. It condemns. Judging is about condemnation. That word "judging" appears in Acts when Paul asks, "Is it because I spoke of the resurrection that I am on trial today?" When we judge, we are putting someone else on trial and we're the judge. We're seeking to condemn. That's why I say it's not restorative. It's not. It's about me. It's all about me. And it may not look that way at the surface, but it is.

Judging. Judging uses unequal measures. Verse 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."

(NIV)

This idea of measuring in the bible, they used measuring systems, and it was oftentimes the case where dishonest measurements were used and you'd have one for one person, and it wouldn't match the standard, so you could get away with a lot. You could give people disproportionate measurements. When we look at other people and we judge them, we don't do it as unbiased and as fairly as we believe we do. We give them a heaping helping of judgment, and for ourselves, we take the teaspoon, and we write it off and we excuse it, and that's the eye that we look at our own sin and our own actions with. We use unequal measurements, but you know what? God doesn't. He doesn't use unfair and unequal measurements.

Before we get to that, all of this ties together, and it should be clear that our judging is malicious. It's not helpful, it's not gracious, it's not correction, it's not discernment. It's not any of those things. By nature, the judgment that Jesus is condemning is malicious. Paul warns of a judgmental environment in Galatians 5:15, and he describes it like this:

"If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."

(NIV)

There's a warning here. If we judge each other, if we live in a culture of judgment and we're judging everything we see and the people we pass by, it's going to destroy the body life that Jesus wants us to have. It's going to destroy our unity, it's going to destroy our love, it's going to destroy discipleship. It's destruction.

Now, we also need to make sure, though, that we don't cast all judgment making in this light. There's a difference – we need to be clear on this – there's a difference between judgmentalism and making wise judgments. There's a difference. There's a time when we must make right judgments, when we must inspect the fruit. If we weren't supposed to do that, Jesus wouldn't have said in verse 15 of Chapter 7 – just look ahead a little bit:

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.”

(NIV)

“In the end,” Jesus says, “thus by their fruit you will recognize them.” We are called to make wise, good judgments. Jesus says this in John 7:24. He says,

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

(NIV)

He says this to the crowd; certainly, it’s applicable to us. How else could we ever do in a restorative way, how else could we ever do church discipline? However could we do that? God will judge those outside, expel the wicked person from among you. There is time when the church following biblical guidelines and principles in a loving, restorative way must make judgment calls, must make good judgments. The judgment in Chapter 7, that’s not what we’re talking about. Those are different things. The judging in Matthew 7 I am calling “judgmentalism.” It’s a mindset. It’s an attitude. It’s a lifestyle. Okay? It’s not exercising wise judgments. Healthy judgments.

On this, one commentator says, “do not judge,” does not mean, “don’t think.” It’s not a requirement to be blind. Don’t judge is not a requirement to be blind. Certainly not. There’s a time for making right judgments. But if we abuse it, we will fall into judgmentalism. We will judge recklessly, we’ll make it a habit, and Jesus warns us against that. He says in verse 2 of Chapter 7:

“For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

(NIV)

As I said, this judging is seeking to cast a verdict. It’s seeking to condemn. It’s an ongoing thing, that’s another part of its nature; it doesn’t stop. It’s unceasing. It’s ongoing. It’s nitpicking. We need to know something else about judgmentalism. Not only, when we judge, does it create a culture of judgmentalism, it also puts us in the line of fire. It’s dangerous. It’s dangerous for *us*. It’s dangerous for the individual. That word, “judged,” is a future tense; it’s not talking just about in-house judgments. It’s not just talking about from me to you, you to another person; this leads up to something worse, more dangerous, more serious. It’s a future tense word; that word says that one day we will be called to a higher account. If we lived a judgmental life, spewing out our opinions and voicing those things carelessly and recklessly, and that’s all we’re doing, it’s dangerous.

And what else does it say about our understanding of grace? Look back with me to Matthew 5:3.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

(NIV)

If I’m being judgmental, how well do I understand how poor I am?

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

(NIV)

If I’m mourning my own sin, if I have a grip on it, how much judgment can I afford others?

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

(NIV)

If I’m meek, when I approach someone it’s not going to be to cast a verdict. It may not even be to say a word. It might be just to spend time with that person loving them, and living out the gospel and the grace of Jesus Christ in front of them, inviting them on a journey with me, maybe focused on this specific area, where I was maybe tempted to judge.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

(NIV)

If we remain judgmental, it shows that we don’t understand Kingdom citizenship, the grace that God has given us, the love that He’s given us. If we remain in that place, it shows that we are rejecting it. We need to be careful of that. This is a big heart issue for us. So what does Jesus want for us? What does He want for us? If He knows that judgmentalism is harmful, if He knows that it’s dangerous, if He knows that it kills fellowship, it kills brotherly love, it kills discipleship... If He knows that, what does He want for us?

What He wants for us is transparent living. This is what He wants for us: transparent living. Let’s read verses 3-5 together.

“Why do you look...?” I love the way He says that. ***“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? 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? 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.”***

(NIV)

“How can you say?” It makes no sense to say that. I couldn’t help but remember days when I had to lift things over my head and work construction and fastenings to ceilings, and a lot of times things would fall in your eye. When something would fall in your eye, it would blind you. Everything you did, you’d be standing there with a sheet of drywall pressed up against the ceiling, you’d be standing there and you’d have drywall debris in your eye. “Help! I can’t see anything! I can’t do my job! I can’t fasten this to the ceiling! I can’t do it! You gotta help me out!” And, sure enough, your friend would fasten his end, and he’d come over and help you with yours.

When we are looking at the sawdust in our brother’s eye, Jesus boils it down to one thing: He boils it down to hypocrisy. It’s acting. That word “hypocrisy” or hypocrite – hypocrites were actors. Their word for actors, pretenders – who are they pretending for? An audience. A show. Right? For everybody watching, for the joy of the show.

Notice the material, the beam and the splinter. The beam is not just any piece of wood. The beam is a floor joist, it’s a rafter, it’s massive. It would be like me in my environment saying, “Hey! You got some drywall dust in your eye,” and he goes, “You’ve got the whole sheet in your eye! Like, what are you doing?” That is funny; it’s supposed to be funny. It’s supposed to grab our attention and show us how ridiculous it is that we judge other people when we’ve got the whole thing in our eye, and we don’t even know it. Look at the material: the splinter and the wood. The splinter and the beam. It’s the same material – it’s both wood. It’s the same thing. We’re not so different.

Look at the proximity, look at how close it is, right? Look at the size of it. Now, the size of it, some may think it means it’s a bigger sin. I don’t think it means it’s a bigger sin. I don’t think the beam is necessarily a bigger sin. I think it’s more dangerous. It’s more dangerous because we’re *blind* to it. It’s more dangerous because it’s invisible to us, and we don’t know it’s there. It’s like this iceberg floating that could sink the ship. Right? It’s very damaging. We don’t know it’s there.

“How can you say to your brother, ‘let me take the speck out of your eye?’”

(NIV)

This reminds me of the attitude that we see often all over the internet. “I’ll tell you how to do it, I’ll tell you how it’s done, and when you can’t figure it out, something’s wrong with *you*.” Right? “If I was that person and I was struggling with what they were doing? Man. I could show them how it’s done.” Right? “If they could only see how I’d do it, they’d fix it. They’d get fixed. They need help. They need to get fixed.” Right? If that’s our mindset and our attitude, that’s judgmentalism.

And so, what do we need? We also need to see our own sin. I think that's very clear and very plain at this point. We need to see our *own* sin. So how do you do this? How do we come to the point where we can see our own sin? And part of it is through close friends that we can trust. Close friends that we can trust. If you don't have someone in your life like that, it's worth developing. It's worth putting some time and prayer into. It's worth spending the relational time in, so that you can have that mentorship and you can have that friend. And you can ask that person, "When you see this about me, I need some outside perspective. I need some pure wisdom. It's very humbling. I need help."

And we all do. And that's why God made a body, right? We *all* need this, to have people in our lives who can help us in this way. And for those of you who are married, one of the best people, despite your hesitation, is your spouse, okay? It's very humbling. But one of the best people is your spouse. They know you very well. In fact, you'll tell yourself, "They're biased. They know me *too* well. They won't be able to get past what they know about me to give me an unbiased opinion, so I'll just go to someone else." A very convenient excuse to avoid the person that God says you're one with. It's very sobering, humorous, and enlightening, as I talked with my wife this week about the areas that were just surfacing, and we got to see some commonalities and some patterns and some things that were very good for me to see.

Now the thing you need to do is you need to pray. You need to put the work in to pray, because the first thing that Jesus mentions is to take the sliver out of your own eye. And we need to take the initiative on that. We individually, collectively, need to take our own initiative on that on having that splinter taken out, and it's going to take, as we said, maybe another follower in Christ. It's also going to take prayer where we just ask God, "God show me, because I don't see it. I don't. I know Your word is true, but I don't see it. I'm blind to it. I don't see when I judge the person walking down the street because of how they're dressed. I don't see when I judge someone because of their vehicle, and I say, 'Oh my goodness. Look at you in your shiny \$60,000 car. Man, what have you sacrificed to get that?'" I don't see it when I do that. But I need to be made aware of it, so that I can repent over it, and the Holy Spirit can work in me to remove those splinters. We all do.

Jesus wants something else for us other than transparent living. When people see my outside, they know what's on the inside. When people see what's on the outside, it's a reflection of what's on the inside, and therefore it becomes kind of transparent. Kind of a backwards way of thinking, but that's how I think of it. And that's how it should be. When we're not acting as hypocrites, right? The next thing is clear sight. We need clear sight. It's interesting, because if you've been blind your whole life, you can't maybe relate to what it is to see. Maybe you don't know that you're blind. You have nothing to assess sight with, right? It's just this mystery. But when Jesus does this work in our hearts and our lives, He gives us clear sight. He gives us sight to see.

Verse 5:

"...then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

(NIV)

There's a lot of heart work and a lot of humility and a lot of repentance that has led up to this. There's a demeanor and a manor and an approach that you're aware of. It's meek. It's humble. It's merciful. It's not condemning, right? We have clear sight now, and so we actually have a shot at being useful, at helping our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I go back to that phrase that Jesus opens with in verse 3: "Why do you look?" I just love that line. I can't get over it. That word "look" is the same word that describes Jesus' apostles looking up to the sky as they watched Him ascend into heaven, *and they're fixated on it!* And they can't look away. "Why do you look...?" Why do you fixate? Why is that, when you look at your brother or sister in Christ, the only thing you see? Looming so large, it eclipses the image-bearer of God that you're looking at. Why do you look? You fixate. And, just like the disciples, we tend to constantly be trying to find our place in the kingdom. Jesus, who's the greatest? Who's the greatest? Is it me? Jesus, who's going to sit at Your right hand? Maybe it's *me*. And, unfortunately, the easiest way to climb that ladder is on our brothers and sisters. When we judge them, when we condemn them, when we elevate ourselves, when we put them down, it's a natural elevation for myself, and it's so wrong. It is not the way the kingdom operates. It is not the economy of Grace.

So how do we remove the speck? The speck in our brother's eye. We do it gently. Gently, gently.

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

(NIV)

I think doing things gently oftentimes gets a bad rap. It comes across as weakness. It comes across as, "Oh, you're not convicted enough! Don't you care?" Doing things gently requires more prayer and patience, requires more heart and care, and so we skip ahead and we blurt, right? It's an immature response.

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.

(NIV)

We really do have a role to play with one another in the work God is doing in us as a body. He is calling us not to judge. He is calling us not to fixate on flaws and faults. We have many of our own. He's calling us to lean on each other. He's calling us to, once again, look back to the Beatitudes and take that grace into our own heart and to live it out. He's calling us not to compromise when there is a speck. Yes, we must and we need to help our brothers and sisters out. We need to. But we need to do it in a way that's restorative.

So how does this look? Maybe the guy that I see always on his phone – I’m describing myself – maybe the guy that I see always on his phone and always behind on his emails, always on his phone but never returning a phone call in time, never returning a text... Maybe I see that in other people because it’s in *me*, so I compensate and I say to myself, “Well, I’m a good dad in this area and I’m a good husband in this area and I put my kids to bed, and I don’t make my wife do that, I do that. I do dishes and I clean the house when she’s on night shift.” And I stack up my own list, and meanwhile, I look at my brother and I say, “I don’t think he does that. I think he’s on his phone too much.” And it’s how I justify my own actions. Maybe what it looks like for me when I’ve seen that speck and God has revealed that to me, maybe it looks like, “Levi, now instead of giving this guy a lecture about how you’re distracted and you’re not supporting your wife and you’re not loving your kids and you’re not building memories, and...”

Maybe it doesn’t look like that at all. It looks like Levi saying, “Hey boys, come on. Let’s go hang out with this person. Let’s go spend an afternoon with them, him and his kids together at the park, and let’s go fishing two weeks from now with him. Let’s go do a project. Let’s make cork guns together. Let’s spend some time actually loving and investing into this person, because if I want them to see something better for life, what a way to do it, instead of coming at it with a list. And maybe that will prepare a conversation to say, “You know, these things that we have, these constant distractions, we need to cut it off. We need to get rid of it. We need to be accountable with our spouses and maybe I won’t even need to say that because this person will see it, through praying for them, through loving them for their own good.” Maybe that’s what it looks like to remove a splinter. We need people like that in our life.

I’ve had people like that in my life. One of the first times I’ve noticed this combination of meekness and gentleness and mercy and grace was in just such an instance someone came to me and said, “By the way, I love having you around, you’re a good friend. This is what I’ve been doing in the past year to try and keep things sustainable in our friendship. I’ve been doing this and this and this, and it was basically cleaning up my messes, and this can’t go on. I can’t do it for another year.” When I heard that, I had never felt so loved, cared for, admonished, trained, built up. The foundation had been laid to speak those wise, gentle words into my life. Maybe that’s what removing a splinter looks like. I’m just going to take a moment to pray before the worship team comes up.

Father, I thank You so much for Your mercy on me, and on us. I thank You that You *do* give us sight and Your Holy Spirit *does* illuminate the truth for us. The truth that we’re blind to. Truth that we would rather not see. Father, I just pray that You would do a good work in our hearts, that You would continue to do it. I know You’re faithful. Please let these words sink deep into our hearts and lives today as we try to live every day more and more as Kingdom citizens for Your glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.