

EVERYBODY DOES IT, AND IT'S FUN!

5th in a Series on Difficult Sayings of Jesus called, "What Did He Say?"

Matthew 7:1-6

As a pastor I occasionally have these conversations with people who try to awkwardly justify themselves even though I've not said anything to them that would require such justification. We have one neighbor who once was defending himself over the issue that he does not go to church. I've never talked to him about that, but for some reason he felt compelled to show that he had good reasons for not attending church. He said he didn't like church because so many people in churches are judgmental and hypocritical. He didn't want any part of this judgmental spirit, especially coming from people who are hypocrites. I guess it didn't occur to him that he was talking to one of those people in the church, one of those judgmental hypocrites he so righteously condemned. The big irony was that he could not see the glaring problem with his accusation. He had lumped a whole bunch of people together and judged them all to be both judgmental and hypocritical! He condemned their actions as wrong! In other words, he did exactly what he objected to those people in the church doing. If you accuse and condemn other people for doing something you do, doesn't that make you a hypocrite? He was a judgmental hypocrite. He was a prime example. I didn't say it, because I didn't want to be offensive, but in retrospect I think should have said what I was thinking, "So you don't like church because there are a lot of people like you there? People doing what you just did to them?" Yeah, that probably would have gone over real well.

I suspect you have heard someone levy that accusation about people in the church being judgmental. I also suspect that you may at times have altered or been careful about what you say or do because of what others in church might think. In other words, you thought they might judge you. Could it be that the stereotype of the frowning, condemning, judgmental religious person has a basis in fact? What would Jesus think about that? Let's look at Matthew 7:1-6 and find out what he says.

DO NOT JUDGE

This is another passage that doesn't seem, on the face of it, all that hard to understand. The command "do not judge" is straightforward, right? However, it is more complicated to live by than we might think at first. In fact, it is another one of those statements of Jesus that is frequently misunderstood and misapplied. Then when we keep going in the passage we run into a really big problem. In verse 6 Jesus says, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs." That's a bit cryptic. It's not immediately clear what he means. Second, to really complicate things it appears Jesus is referring to people as dogs and pigs.

So he starts off saying we shouldn't judge people then ends up calling people dogs and pigs, which is horribly judgmental. Let's see if we can figure this out.

The command "do not judge" is far and away the most popular of Jesus' teachings in our society today. Everything and everyone is to be accepted and even approved of today. In fact, in the eyes of many in our nation the only wrong is judging someone else to be in the wrong. The new Golden Rule is "do not judge." This new standard makes it impossible to call any behavior morally wrong. If you even hint that something someone does is wrong you are certain to get the response, "You're judging me! You don't have the right to judge me." But to take this command as a blanket statement that any kind of judging is to be avoided always, has some serious flaws.

The first flaw is that everybody judges and we do it all the time. Even those who tell others they must never judge, actually judge a lot. Pastor John Burke of Austin, Texas put it well. He said, "Judging is *fun*! I'm not sure I've gone a single day without this sin...I watch the news and condemn those idiot people who do such things. Most reality TV shows are full of people I judge as sinful, ignorant, stupid, arrogant or childish. I get in my car and drive and find a host of inept drivers who should have flunked their driver's test...Judging is our favorite pastime if we're honest. But we're not! We're great at judging the world around us by standards we would highly resent being held to."

It's true. Everybody judges, and we do it all the time. Even those who preach total tolerance and say they abhor judging, in fact judge people all the time. People are not honest even with themselves about how judgmental they are. And social media has poured gasoline on the flame. This is so true that in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy* the late Dallas Willard wrote, "condemnation...is such a large part of 'normal' human existence that we may not even be able to imagine what life would be without it."

Sadly, it's hard to deny that the church does, indeed, have its fair share of judgmental, hypocritical people. In his book, *Holiness By Grace*, Bryan Chapell, who was a pastor for many years, wrote of his dismay at discovering an appalling truth. He said he got to a place where he had to admit to himself that while many of the people in his church were faithful and knowledgeable of the Bible, they were also bitter and intolerant. They were quick to judge.

I wish I could point my finger at all those hypocritical people out there who are judgmental. Unfortunately I am guilty as charged. Like John Burke I shake my head in disgust at the stupidity of some drivers, and at the annoying people in the grocery store who can't figure out that the express checkout lane is not intended for someone buying an entire week's worth of groceries for a family of 12. A number of years ago I had a pitiful reminder of my

tendency to judge. Laurie and I were on vacation and there were some good friends staying in the same area, so we all decided to get together for dinner one evening. They gave us directions to the condo where they were staying so we could drive there and meet them, then we'd all go to a restaurant. As we drove up to the condo complex I could see our friend had come out to the road so we'd see him. He was standing by the street talking to what was obviously a street person. I knew what was going on the instant I saw it because the street people find me even when I'm on vacation to hit me up for money. I knew immediately that this guy had been walking by, saw my friend standing there and was no doubt spinning his tale of woe to get my friend to fork over some cash. We got out of the car, walked over to the two men and our friend introduced us to the man he was talking to. It turned out he wasn't a street person at all. He lived a couple of blocks away and was walking to a Bible Study down the street. He saw my friend standing there and struck up a conversation with him hoping to tell him the good news of Jesus! Nice going, Rick.

So judging seems to be an inherent aspect of human nature. But that doesn't mean it should be, right? However, there is another problem with the blanket statement that we should never, ever judge anything or anyone, an obvious philosophical and sociological problem. If we are never to judge anything to be wrong, how are we going to have laws to live by? A law is a recognition and agreement among the people of a society that some behavior is wrong and must be prohibited. If we do not ever judge anything to be wrong, then we will never have any laws against any behavior. What, then, is to stop people from killing others who offend them, make them angry or hurt them? What is to stop people from simply taking whatever they want from other people? What is to stop strong people from oppressing, abusing and misusing weaker people? What is to stop people from trampling all over the rights of other people simply because they are of a different race or culture?

We must have laws to set boundaries in our society, to protect people and make it possible for us to live in peace and security. Without laws we would literally have anarchy, violent chaos. It would be an incredibly dangerous society. But to have laws, we must judge. We must judge some things to be wrong.

We live in a very hypocritical, logically inconsistent society. Maybe that's true of every society, but it is surely true of ours. We live in a culture that breathes the air of "do not judge." Any kind of judging is narrow minded, intolerant, bigoted, wrong. But it is also the society with a rampant Me Too movement. Women are coming out of the woodwork to accuse some man, usually a highly visible, well known one, of sexual harassment or worse. Don't we have to ask, "Is sexual harassment wrong?" My answer to that question is "absolutely yes," but if our culture insists that there is no true moral right and wrong, that we must never judge what other people do, how can it be wrong? It's just an alternative lifestyle.

So in order to have a civilization we absolutely must judge. As we have seen, the fact is that everybody judges, because everybody must judge. We have to decide what is right and wrong. And everyone does it. Really the only outstanding matter is where you draw the lines. We all will and must judge. Some judge along more restrictive lines than others, but who is to say one who has more lenient lines is more right than one with less lenient lines? Who is to judge that?

One problem with “do not judge” is that the term “judge” has a fairly wide semantic range. In other words, it has a variety of meanings. We have people whose job is to discern right from wrong. We even call them judges. Are they doing something bad in judging? Was the person who determined that best in show at the recent Westminster dog show was a bizarre looking poodle, wrong because he was judging? Think of how bad he must have made all those other cute dogs feel with his narrow, judgmental attitude. When I played baseball for a brief few practices our coach tried me as an outfielder where it was important to judge where fly balls were going to land. Was that wrong? Is it wrong when we encourage a teenager to use “good judgment”?

Clearly Jesus did not mean that we are never to judge anyone or anything in any way. In fact, in this very same sermon he had taught about many things that we must avoid because God judged them to be wrong. Then what did he mean when he said, “Do not judge”? We will get a better sense of that by looking further on in the passage, especially noting the next section.

DO NOT BE A HYPOCRITE

Jesus used some humor beginning in verse 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?” His goal here is to crack us up. Imagine a person with a 6-foot long two-by-four sticking out of his eye pointing out to another person that he or she has a tiny speck of dust in their eye. It is a funny image. But the image points out an obvious problem. All of us have blind spots, areas of glaring flaws that somehow we can’t see. Weirdly, we have few blind spots when it comes to the flaws of others. We can see them perfectly well. And obviously, since we don’t notice the huge log sticking out of our own face we are justifiably proud of our superiority to them.

Fifteen years of watching bad baseball from the Padres has been wearing on me. My frustrations feel like they’re nearing the breaking point. Last year they were supposed to turn the corner as a team after committing \$300 million to free agent Manny Machado and bringing up a couple of exciting rookies. And they did turn a corner. Unfortunately it was the corner from Pathetic Place to Awful Avenue. Even their owner said the second half of

the season they played some of the most pitiful baseball he's ever seen. Many of my frustrations have focused on Mr. Unfulfilled Potential, a player named Will Myers. He is on a contract that will pay him \$82 million! Do you know how much money that is? Yes, I know, it's about what it takes the federal government about two seconds to spend. But for an individual, this is crazy money. And they pay him all that to be woefully bad. I had great hopes for this offseason. I was sure they would unload him. I even proposed a trade. He can play outfield. The Cleveland Indians need an outfielder. I checked with them. They were open to this trade. The Indians get Myers and have to pay a quarter of his bloated salary, and the Padres get a box of baseballs and two tickets to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland. Is that a great deal, or what? And the Padres didn't do it. Oh the disappointment. So this year, once again I will be annoyed by him, I'll vent my frustrations, I'll tell anyone willing to listen what a waste of money he is. But here's the problem. At the best I have ever been in my life, was I ever close to even being able to play as badly as he does? No. I wasn't even in the same time zone as him. I wasn't on the same continent as him. I wasn't on the same planet as him. I could never have hoped to do what I want him to do. Well what if somebody paid me \$82 million to do it? Wouldn't change a thing. I couldn't do it, couldn't even dream of doing it, so why get so down on him? Well because I've got a bat in my eye and can't seem to focus on my flaws, but I can see his just fine.

All right, but how does that help us understand what it means to not judge? That's where we have to do some thinking about context. This section is a part of the Sermon on the Mount. At the end of chapter 6 Jesus was talking about how we should build up treasures in heaven, trust the Father to provide what we need and seek his kingdom. Then suddenly we get "do not judge." It doesn't seem to have any connection to what Jesus has been saying. Some assume that Jesus is just addressing a new topic, which is possible. But I think there's a connection to the larger context.

In 5:43 Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" Who said that? It was the religious leaders of Israel. Most of the second half of chapter 5 is aimed at them. In 6:1 he said, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them." Who did that? The Pharisees. In 6:3 he said, "When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others." Who did he have in mind? The Pharisees. In 6:5 Jesus said, "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others." What hypocrites was he talking about? The Pharisees. In 6:16 he said, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting."

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At the end of chapter 6 when Jesus talked about seeking first the kingdom of God he still had the Pharisees in the crosshairs, for they pursued all the things of this world like wealth

and status rather than God's kingdom. In 7:15 Jesus said, "Watch out for the false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By your fruit you will recognize them." Who was he warning about? Once again, it was the Pharisees.

The target of this sermon was the Pharisees. From beginning to end Jesus attacked their approach to relating to God. In Luke 18:10-12 Jesus told this parable. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'"

How does that strike you? Yuck! "I'm not like other people." What does he mean? "I'm better than them, because look at how good I am and how bad they are." That guy had set himself up as judge, gave himself an A plus and issued a resounding F to everybody else. The problem isn't that he judged being a robber or an adulterer to be wrong. Those things *are* wrong. God clearly said they are wrong. The problem was that this Pharisee set himself up as the judge. He was the arbiter of right and wrong and could therefore judge himself to be approved and worthy while looking down on and condemning other people.

This is why Jesus brought up judging in this sermon. It was because the Pharisees judged themselves to be above other people, to be righteous and worthy of God's love and acceptance. And they looked at other people with a microscope, identifying every minute misstep they could identify. This was the kind of judging that Jesus warned against here. It is essentially setting oneself up as the judge with the right to condemn the obvious unworthiness of other people.

We have seen that everybody judges, and everybody must judge for society to exist, we must judge in order to live. When it comes to judging, people draw lines in different places. Who is right? Generally in the world the answer is that the person who has the most power or the people who have the most people agree with them get to draw the lines. But that's not a good answer, because that means there still is no true standard of right and wrong, there's only power. It opens up unlimited possibilities for abuse and oppression of other people. The best answer is if there is some source who knows absolutely what humans must do and what they must not do so that all can thrive and live fully, that person should be the one to judge where the lines are drawn. No human is. That person is God. No human is good enough, wise enough, just enough, knowledgeable enough and loving enough to make those kinds of calls. Only an all-wise, all-knowing, good, just and loving God should make the call.

James 4:12 says, "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you, who are you to judge your neighbor?" There is only one Lawgiver. Only

one who is able and has the right to give laws, to say what is right and wrong because he objectively and truthfully knows what is life giving and what is life taking for us to do. And only he has the right to judge people. So we must never set ourselves up as the judges, the arbiters and determiners of right and wrong. If God says it is wrong then we must agree. But it is up to God to condemn and reward, not us.

Remember that Jesus started this sermon saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” The very act of taking it upon yourself to look down on someone else, to set yourself up as the judge, is a denial of your spiritual poverty. It means you don’t think you are poor in spirit at all, but in your judgment, others are.

DO NOT BE A IDIOT

That brings us to that weird saying in verse 6. Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to a pig. Wow, that sounds like Jesus is calling people dogs and pigs. Now maybe that’s not so bad. Our daughter in law, Anna, loves dogs. She says she’s a dog person. She might say she prefers dogs to people. And she also likes pigs. She used to raise them. She’d probably say she wishes she could have one now.

But no one in ancient Israel preferred dogs to people, and no one liked pigs even a little. Dogs weren’t viewed as precious pets. They were not companion pets or therapy dogs. They were scavengers. They were often viewed as dirty pests that could be dangerous. Just a few weeks ago they had the Westminster Dog Show. Having a dog show would have been a laughable absurdity to the people of Jesus’ day. It would have been like having a coyote show in our culture.

Pigs were much worse. They weren’t just seen as unclean. They had contagious uncleanness. A person would become unclean before God, unacceptable to him, just by touching a pig. They treated pigs the way we might relate to someone with Covid-19, more commonly known as the novel corona virus. You don’t even want to be in the same room with such a person and you for sure don’t want to touch them. That’s a bit like ancient Israelis regarded pigs. To call someone a pig would have been the equivalent of using some of the foulest language in English to describe how terrible a person is.

At first glance, then, it looks like Jesus, who said we shouldn’t judge people, is now doing just that and categorizing some as being the worst imaginable. He’s being Uber judgmental. Sometimes you will hear people interpreting this to mean that as believers we have to see that with some people there is no point sharing the good news of Jesus with them because they are so closed to it. They’ll just trample on it. It would be like we are giving pigs our pearls. But that has nothing to do with the context and it would be the opposite of “do not judge.” It asks us to make a judgment that only God can make. “Oh, this person is a dog, I

shouldn't offer him the sacred truth of grace." We are not called to judge people like that. It still requires us judging some people to be dogs or pigs. This should cause us to suspect this is not correct.

Once again the solution for us is to recognize that Jesus is using more humor and giving us an illustration. He is not calling people pigs or dogs, he is using those animals as an illustration of one idea. And it's a funny illustration. Would you give what is sacred to a dog? Toby and Anna have two dogs. One of them, Banjo, has endeared himself to me over the years. He was a rescue dog. He's just a good old dog who loves his people and is protective of them. I like Banjo. But I have never offered him communion. He would have exactly zero idea of what that is about. "Here, Banjo. Jesus said this is my body, take and eat." Do you know what Banjo is thinking? "Squirrel!" You would have to be an idiot to try to give communion to Banjo thinking that it means anything to him other than, "can't I have a bigger cracker?"

We have some friends who live in Iowa. They once raised pigs. I checked with them. They insisted that pearls are not a part of any pig's diet, nor are any other precious gems. They have no interest whatsoever in such things. You'd have to be as dumb as a box of rocks to offer pearls to pigs. They'd just trample all over them in the mud. No, it's dumb to feed pearls to pigs, because, as we all know, they are only interested in diamonds. Uh, no. No gems of any kind for pigs.

Jesus is not saying that some people are dogs or pigs. He's saying don't be stupid, like someone who offers some diamonds to hogs. Do not judge. But that does not mean put your brain on the shelf and consider everything to be just fine. Those things that God has clearly identified as wrong you need to judge to be wrong. That doesn't mean condemning people. It is up to God to condemn if anyone is to be condemned. But if God says adultery is wrong, don't call it an alternative lifestyle. That's throwing pearls to pigs.

This is important, because just a few verses farther on Jesus is going to tell us to "enter through the narrow gate" and to watch out for false prophets. If "do not judge" means don't consider anything ever to be wrong, then the gate is not narrow, it's so wide it isn't even a gate. And no prophet is ever false, because false means wrong, and there is no wrong. There's just different. Don't be a moron and think like that.

APPLICATION

LET GOD'S WORD RULE

In the context of "do not judge" we have to have some boundaries. We have to have something that divides right from wrong. If we do not we invite disaster. Did you watch the

half time show of the Super Bowl? I may invite some criticism here, but the little I saw of it made me think, this is the sort of thing that happens when you give pigs pearls to eat. It is what happens when you put your brain on the shelf. This is a football game that millions of young boys are watching. And at half time you offer them “entertainment” that includes pole dancing and a show that belongs in a sleazy strip club. This in a culture that howls in righteous indignation against the objectification of women? What message do you think you just sent to those soon to be hormone driven boys?

That’s just a mild example of what is happening in our culture. “Do not judge” cannot mean nothing is ever off limits. In our personal lives we need to not be morons and foolishly accept everything. We need to let God decide where the limits are.

START WITH POVERTY OF SOUL

The wise application of “do not judge” begins where Jesus started this sermon. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. We all know that one’s status in society is heavily influenced by one’s personal net worth. The person making minimum wage working at Taco Bell, scraping by on food stamps and living in a car, is not highly respected. Their opinions are not sought. They are not envied. The people who have huge net worth are envied. They are the ones with power and influence, the ones others aspire to be. No one thinks the Taco Bell guy is above Jeff Bezos of Amazon or Bill Gates. In the spiritual realm the only way we get into the kingdom of God is to recognize that we’d have to improve dramatically to be at the level of the Taco Bell employee. When we admit this we realize that we have no room for looking down on anyone. For us to look down on, condemn or judge other people is like the guy living in his 1985 Yugo looking down on someone living in a 1984 Yugo.

A number of years ago while on vacation Laurie and I went to a church on Sunday morning. This particular day, for whatever reason, the bass player on their worship team was fighting the good fight but losing the battle. I don’t know what was going on with the guy but he was just not getting it done. He eventually just gave up and walked off the stage. For a long time I remembered that guy and laughed about it. Until I started playing bass on Sunday mornings and butchered some songs. It gave me a whole new perspective on that guy, one that was much more empathetic. I developed poverty of musical soul. Then one day we were at the Disneyland Resort and we listened to a really good band playing. I watched the bass player. I had no idea what he was doing, except I now knew I was much worse than I had thought. I knew I had no place to judge any bass player, ever. And so it will be with us when we know our own poverty of soul.

Two ideas can help us with the tricky balance of using good judgment but not judging. First, always value the person and let them know how much you value them. Even if a

person is doing what is clearly wrong, we are still to value them. Second, remember the classic words of Jesus in verse 12. Do to others what you would like them to do to you. Judge them the way you'd like others to judge you.

REMEMBER THE POWER OF AFFIRMATION

We long to be in a place where we are totally accepted. We know we aren't perfect, or anywhere close. But we want to be loved anyway. We badly need affirmation, and the more we fall short the more we need forgiveness and that affirmation. In his book, *Simple Faith*, Chuck Swindoll wrote, "There are more than enough critics roaming the landscape. What we need to remember is the demoralizing impact judging has on individuals... How much more wholesome and needed is a word of affirmation."

Many years ago I was in an elder meeting at the church I was serving at the time just after I had returned from a vacation. I had tried to make sure that I had organized and delegated all my responsibilities before I left, but one thing kind of slipped through the cracks. It had to do with an announcement that was supposed to be made in a worship service while I was away. It was actually a pretty trivial matter, and the foul up that happened was not actually my fault, but an error I made contributed. One of the elders who was involved just unloaded on me in the meeting for my mistake. I owned up and apologized. I didn't try to minimize it or shift blame. But that wasn't good enough for this guy. Even after I had apologized he continued to berate me, and no one in the meeting made any effort to defend me. Man, did that feel bad. I felt judged and condemned. I absolutely did not feel loved.

Did I need to learn from my mistake? Yes, although to this day I still am amazed that such a small thing was turned into a major issue. But most of all I found myself longing for a little compassion and understanding. I yearned for those guys to be for me, not condemn me. And I couldn't help but doubt that this is the way things are in the kingdom of God, so what was that?

Yes, we need to use good judgment, but let's try to major in loving people as we do so and remember that everyone we ever encounter is dying for affirmation and encouragement.