

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Matthew 7:1-6
“Pause And Discern”

June 7, 2015
(2nd Sunday After Pentecost)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

IIIC'1: MATTHEW 7:1-6

"PAUSE AND DISCERN"

- Leviticus 19:17-18:** **How God's People In A Shared Covent Deal With Inevitable Conflict**
 //How We In The Church Are To Relate
 Brother = Neighbor = Your Own People = Jews
- a "You shall not hate your brother in your heart,
 b but you shall reason with your neighbor,
 c lest you bear sin because of him.
- a' You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people,
 b' but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: **Further Example Of Higher Righteousness, 5:20**
 c' I am the Lord." **The Quest Vs. Cynicism, Boredom, Isolation: Trust God**
Judgmental Pharisees (9:1, 12:2, 15:1-2), Integrity Gap (23:2-4)
Sin Makes Us Forget Who God Is! Install Self On Throne
Pharisees Are Judgmental In 9:11, 12:2, 15:1-2, Hypocrites In 23:2-4
What Does It Mean To Love My Neighbor?

1) 7:1-6 TOUCHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER BELIEVERS.

		Not Prohibit Simple Ethical Judgment, Evaluate/Not Condemn	
		a) vv.1-2 Negative Command + Reason + Explanation: Do Not Judge (Consider), Q. Lk. 6:37-38	
		Gk. Krinete As Condemn (Mt. 12:41-42, 20:18, Romans 2:1-3, James 5:9)	
1	1a	"Judge (condemn) not, b that you not <i>be</i> judged (passive voice = condemned by God).	Challenges Daily, Assumed Activity: CW
2	2a	<u>For</u> with the judgment (condemnation) you pronounce b you will <i>be</i> judged (p.v. by God), a' and the measure you give b' will <i>be</i> the measure you get (p.v. from God).	We Shape God's Response To Us, No Critical Spirit Words, Reason: Don't Assume God's Role, Word Rom. 2:1-3, 14:10, m. Sotah 1:7, At End/In Present Actions, 5:7, 6:14-15, Mk. 4:24, Scale Image, Deed Rather, A Call For Mercy, Humility, Tolerance Only God Can Separate Good From Evil At End

What We Are Not To Do/ What We Are To Do

b) vv.3-4 Rhetorical Questions On Two Errors: What We See, Then Say, Q.

Common Jewish Imagery, Mid-Eastern Humor //Lk. 6:41-42a (exact)

- 3 1 *Why* do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, **2nd Plural you, Error No. 1 = See Flaws**
Speck/Log (2x: a-b//a'-b')) = Small/Large Defect
- Q 2 but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **Romans 2:1, 14:4, One Effect Of Sin: Blind**
We Are Blind To Ourselves, Hypocrites
- 4 1' Or how can you *say* to your brother,
 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' **Error No. 2 = Say What We See**
Ignorant Of Self, Arrogant To Others
Get Under God's Spotlight First!
- Q 2' when there is a log in your own eye? **Jesus Is Comic And Serious //Rom. 2:1**
How Can I Judge Another When My Sins Are Visible?

b') v.5 "Hypocrites" Named And Answered: Exhortation, Q. Alternative, Gal. 6:1-5, I Cor. 5

Language = Typically Jewish, //b. Arakhin 16b

- 5 3 *You hypocrite* (play-actor), **Direct Address, Applied To Christians**
God- Awareness → Self-Awareness → Humility, Rom. 14:4, Not Moral Police
- 2' first take the log out of your own eye, **Log/Speck (1x), Action No. 1: Turn Spotlight On You**
Reprove Yourself, Only Then Serve Others, Sirach 18:20
- 1'' and then you will see clearly **//James 3:1-4:12, Action No. 2: Gentle Correction To Help**
 to take the speck out of your brother's eye. **Help/ Not Condemn, //Mt. 18:15-20, 2 Sam. 12:1-5 (David)**
Improve Sight, Reprove Self First, No Critical Spirit
There Are Limits In Correction, Discernment Is Still Required, v.6

a') v.6 Negative Command + Reason: Do Judge (Discern Receptivity), Mt. Only (M).

Spot Holy/Unclean Things, Use Judgment

- 6 1 Do not give *to dogs* what is holy (i.e. meat from temple) **Lev. 22:14, Romans? Qualifies v.1**
Unteachable! Truth Not Imposed //m. Temurah 6:5
- 2 and do not throw your pearls (i.e. wisdom/gospel) *before swine*, **Gentiles? 13:45, 15:26-27, Prov. 23:9**
Test All, 1 Thess. 5:21, Phil 3:2, 1 Jn. 4:1, 2 Pt. 2:22
- 7 2' lest they trample them under foot (i.e. what pigs do) **Didache 9:5 On Eucharist, Thomas 93**
Not Excessive Laxity, Not Abandon Judgment, Avoid Some People
- 1' and turn to attack you" (i.e. what dogs do). **Ps. 22:16, Is Correction Welcomed? Avoids Laxity**
Making Distinctions, 7:6-12, 15-20; 10:11-15, 16:6, 12; 18:19-18; 23 (Jesus)
Acts 13:46, 18:6, 19:9, There Is A Limit To Not Judging, Don't Waste Time On The Resistant

Moral Discernment Is Not The Same As Moral Condemnation

A Brief Treatment Of Matthew 7:1-6

This thought unit stands as the first of a pair of panels dealing with relationships within Jesus’ kingdom community, the first (7:1-6) primarily horizontal, the second (7:7-12) primarily vertical. The first bids us to give up condemning others even while retaining moral discernment; the second bids us to have confidence in God’s fatherly goodness through persistent prayer. I do not have final authority over another of Jesus’ followers, and God is more than able to sustain his people with good things as they seek him together. That the two panels are to be read as a pair, and thus form a larger sub-section with the larger Sermon on the Mount (IIC’), is indicated by their parallel structures. Both are 4:2 concentric or chiasmic patterns (a-b//b’-a). Each begins with a command and reason (a. vv.1-2 // a. vv.7-8) and closes with a command and reason (a’ v.6 // a’ v.12). At the double center are two questions (b. vv.3-4 // b. vv.9-10) followed by two answers (b’ v.5 // b’ v.11) using direct address (*You hypocrite* [v.5a] // *you then, who are evil* [v.11a]). Jesus’ vision is theocentric. God is the only competent judge, though he may use us—if properly prepared through God-aided self-examination—to morally aid one another. God is also able to supply the community through our prayers so that we both live by God’s generosity and pass it on.

The sources of Matthew 7:1-6 are Q (vv.1-2 // Lk. 6:37-38, vv.3-5 // Lk. 6:41-42) and M (v.6 is found only in Matthew). Luke has a series of four commands in series (*Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not..., forgive..., give...*), Matthew only the first, “Judge not, that you not be judged.” My guess is Matthew shortened the series for focus, understanding that judging means condemning as if one was God. The reason Luke gives for the series, “For the measure you *give* will be the measure you get back,” becomes in Matthew a second parallel reason after “For with the judgment you *pronounce* you will be judged,” which allows Matthew to teach that condemning judgments may be in word (*pronounce*) and in deed (*give*). That vv.3-5 are nearly verbatim to Luke 6:41-42 is a witness to how both evangelists were faithful to the tradition that came to them, whether in oral or written form. That v.6 is only found in Matthew, and that it is placed as an inclusion with vv.1-2 as a negative command (*Judge not // Do not give*) indicates Matthew has carefully edited his sources into the structured thought unit we observe in 7:1-6. We are neither to be too strict (vv.1-2) nor too lax (v.6) in our evaluations. God is the judge, and Jesus speaks on behalf of his Father when he makes unflattering judgments of people as dogs and swine.

A complex series of judgments and motivations are nested together in vv.1-2. The command, “Judge/Condemn not,” is a call to obedience, followed by a reason and motivation, “that you not *be judged*,” which is a reverential passive meaning *by God*. If I assume God’s place in the life of another, I will be in turn be judged as presumptuous. God applies to me the same harsh standard I applied to them, whether in word, “For with the judgment you *pronounce*” or deed, “and the measure *you give*.” Jesus then asks two questions about why we *see* as we do (v.3) and why we *say* what we do (v.4). The answer is that sin impairs cognition and our eyes look outward to others and not inward at ourselves. We see in others what is already in ourselves, as in the children’s retort, “Takes one to know one.” Their speck reveals our beam, and we wear a mask of false righteousness to conceal ourselves. But, if we are to perform minor eye surgery on another, we must first see clearly, and that comes from letting God first perform major surgery on us. The possibility of other-correction being fruitful comes only after the gifts of inward sight, inward repentance, and self-correction; then we go in humility, not arrogance. Jesus was not naive about spiritual and moral barbarism and so counsels caution when presenting holy and valuable things to people God has not yet awakened. To judge and not judge at the right time and in the right way requires wisdom.

PAUSE AND DISCERN

“... and the measure you give will be the measure you get.”

God gives us freedom to shape the quality of our relationship with God.

MATTHEW 7:2 b

A grocery clerk wrote Ann Landers how she'd seen shoppers with food stamps buy luxury items like birthday cakes and shrimp. The angry woman said such people who buy non-necessities are “lazy and wasteful.” A woman wrote back:

“I didn't buy a cake, but I did buy a big bag of shrimp with food stamps. My husband had been working at a plant for fifteen years when it shut down. The shrimp casserole was for our wedding anniversary dinner and lasted three days. Perhaps the grocery clerk would have a different view... after walking a mile in my shoes.”

Another wrote a letter than was also published by Landers:

“I'm the woman who bought the \$17.00 cake and paid with food stamps. I thought the check-out woman would burn a hole through me with her eyes..... The cake was for my little girl's birthday. It will be her last. She has bone cancer and will probably be gone within six months.”¹

The medieval mystic Thomas a Kempis wrote:

“There is always one fact more in every life of which we know nothing, therefore Jesus says, ‘Judge not.’ Be not angry that you cannot make others as you want them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be.”²

¹ Edited from Terrie Williams, *The Personal Touch* (Warner Books, 1994).

² Preaching Today search under Matthew 7:1-6.

To be shocked at the error of our opinions is a vivid form of God’s correcting grace, preserving us from taking on divine prerogatives. After listening, I’m often forced to say, “I was wrong about this person. Forgive me, Lord.” We are called to forsake the role of judge for something more humble, less omnipotent. Jesus’ words are not just wise human relations; they are a law of the universe, as unbreakable as gravity, “Judge not, that you not be judged.” It is a command plus a warning: a command because we are under orders, a warning because we are on probation, “Condemn not, that you not be condemned.”³ Controlling one another through judgments and wonderful advice is not our job.

Until we see people through the merciful eyes of God the Father, until the risen Jesus shows us worth and beauty amidst the crud and compromise, until the Holy Spirit corrects our sight with divine revelation, we do not understand one another at any depth. It is our ignorance that makes us arrogant, critical, judgmental and condemning. And Christ forbids it for our good.

The passage before us was not conceived as general wisdom but specific counsel for disciples living in close community as they followed Jesus as his students. How are Peter and Andrew to live on the road with their old fishing buddies James and John? How is Matthew, the-sell-out-to-the-Romans-tax-collector, to sleep around the same camp fire with Simon the-freedom-fighter-Jewish-zealot? Should Mary Magdalene be on the road with us? Think of a sports team or a submarine crew or a blended family or a mission trip or a marriage. How do we get along with people just like us, sinners following a Savior? The first rule is: we give up condemning judgments. I focus on my character before God, not yours before me; I do not speak to another or gossip about their sins and failings until I can go to them in love and humility with God’s permission. Jesus is speaking to adults about adults; it is also applicable, with some changes, to parents and children. We are not to demean one another, not to tear each other down either face to face or behind the back. I do not get to be God in your life. Dr. John Stott makes this comment:

“The secret of our relationships with one another, especially when we have differences, is (the confession) ‘Jesus Christ is Lord.’ To despise or stand in judgement on a fellow Christian isn't just a breach of

³ An excellent pastoral and philosophical treatment of Matthew 7:1-6 is Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996), 215-230.

fellowship. It is a denial of the Lordship of Jesus.... Who am I, that I should cast myself in the role of another Christian's lord and judge? I must be willing for Jesus Christ to be not only my Lord and Judge, but also my fellow Christian's Lord and Judge. ... I must not interfere with Christ's Lordship over other Christians.”⁴

If we give up our searchlights and stand under God's spotlight, if we become more self-critical than other-critical, if we go to God before we go to others, and if we learn— as Jesus counseled— to watch over one another in love, we may have a chance to enter a new world in the midst of the current one, a place where it is safe not to be perfect or to have to play like you are for religious reasons, where fear ceases and love grows, where people can learn what it means to live a holy and a happy life in partnership with Christ and his people, all of whom are still *in process*.

Having a critical spirit is not a gift of the Spirit. It is the mother of gossip, and its bitter offspring is a divided church where everyone is complaining. So if you find yourself keeping mental notes of what's wrong with others and how much better they might be if only they followed your shining example, listen. Jesus' words are for our healing and to preserve us from judgment and pain. My conscience was stung by the words of the martyred Catholic bishop Carlo Carretto, “We are not happy because we are unforgiving, and we are unforgiving because we feel superior to others.”⁵ When I judge you, I may be right about your moral deficit, but I am always wrong about mine because I am not superior; God has not appointed me interim deity.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

a) vv.1-2 Leave The Ultimate Judging To God Alone.

Jesus begins with a command, “Judge not,” which might be better understood as “Condemn not.”⁶ The call is not to give up moral evaluation as in modern

⁴ Preaching Today search under Matthew 7:1-6.

⁵ Idem.

⁶ That the word *judge* implies condemnation and not just casual observation is clear from the parallel in Luke 6:37, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; *condemn not*, and you will not *be condemned*."

understandings of tolerance, it is not to take the judge's chair for God. Then a reason for the command as a warning and appeal to self-interest, "that you not *be* judged," meaning "by God." Thirdly an explanation of the just process behind the reason, "For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged," which is followed by a parallel phrase for emphasis, "and the measure you give will be the measure you get." When I act like God in someone's life, in word or in deed, God applies the same to me. I forget I am under a greater judge. Could some of the difficulty in our lives be that we've dared God to deal as harshly with us as we do with others? God says, "I now treat you the same way. Let's try that for a while and see how it goes."

Notice that Jesus did not just issue arbitrary commands; he gave careful reasons and explanations. His multi-level appeal is to obedience, thus the command; to self-interest, thus the warning, and to reasoned understanding about the just character of his Father. And since I can judge and condemn people with words, "for with the judgment *you pronounce*," or without words through deeds, "and the measure *you give*," both are included. There is nowhere to hide from this calculation. And the use of the passive voice indicates that the one who acts upon us is God, as in "Judge not, that you not *be judged* (i.e. by God). And by my count, the cast of characters in five:

- 1) me, the self-appointed, self-righteous judge, God's little policeman;
- 2) the one I condemn in word or action;
- 3) the God who judges my judging as presumptuous;
- 4) the Jesus who is kind enough to alert me his follower to the seriousness of the process, now and at the Last Judgment; and
- 5) other disciples who are hearing the same words and coming under the same inward conviction of sin.

Behind this complex statement of Jesus are a range of at least five other commitments that help it make sense:

- 1) That all our thoughts and deeds are known. God is all-seeing and all-knowing and all-remembering. God is omnipresent and omniscient.
 - 2) That loving God and not the neighbor is a disconnect; God desires deep
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integrity among followers of his Son.

- 3) That Jesus claims to know the mind of God which has implications for who he is: he is uniquely God with us in flesh. His words are God’s words, finally vindicated in his bodily resurrection. When we read the words of Jesus, we hear the echo of God’s voice.
- 4) That conflicts are expected with sinners like us in the world as it is. The test is how we work it out with one another in Jesus’ new family.
- 5) Finally, that God honors our freedom to the point that it shapes his response to us within the bounds of his character. This is an interactive Triune God who responds to my responses, as in a chess game or tennis match. It’s a real relationship. God’s character is unchanging, and one of God’s unchanging decisions is that divine mercy is intended to make us merciful; divine patience intended to make us patient, divine judgment is to make us cautious. If it does not, meaning if I resist, things do not stay the same, and that is already a judgment. Each day we are becoming the kind of person we will be when we stand before God for the great truth-telling. God promises to apply to me– now and later– the standards I apply to others. How sobering is that?

This last insight is played out most clearly with my closest neighbor and fellow disciple: Lori. When unkind (e.g when I grunt and don’t listen, when I don’t give her time, when I am verbally blunt), I sense a change in my relationship with God. Clouds roll in; the sun dims. What I give her, I soon get in return, which is why the Apostle Peter– himself a married man– said in his first letter:

“Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, *in order that your prayers may not be hindered.*”⁷

Where did this amazing insight come from? From Peter getting on his knees one morning and meeting a brass heaven. He asked; there was no answer. He sought; there was no finding. He knocked; no one opened. “What’s wrong?” God answered, “If you are wrong with your wife, Peter, then you are wrong with me. You know

⁷ 3:7.

what you did; humble yourself and make it right, then we can talk.”

The quickest way to re-open the heavens over your life is to go and fix any broken relationships. Humble yourself. Even if they don't respond at first, God will! If there is no flow of provisions, perhaps you've been cheap with others. If no joy, perhaps you've become a grouch with those closest to you at work and at home. We can't help but see in others the flaws that are unaddressed in our own soul. We see the world as we are. The lenses inside our heads are clouded; sin blinds us to the truth. So when you condemn someone in the privacy of your thoughts, even more if you hear it come out of your mouth in an unguarded moment, recognize it says more about your spiritual sickness than about any flaw in the other person. Let it be a warning something is wrong. It is time for self-examination. In the logic of the kingdom we receive what we give. It's not impersonal karma; it's God getting our attention! I aim at being merciful because I need so much of it from God.

A doctor chatting at a party with a lawyer was interrupted by a woman who insisted on telling about pain in her leg. The doctor advised her, then— after she went away— asked the lawyer, "Do I have a right to send that woman a bill?"

"Certainly," the lawyer replied.

The next day the doctor sent the woman a bill. That same day he received a bill from the lawyer!"⁸ “And the measure you give will be the measure you get.”

b/b') vv.3-5 The Cartoon Of The Speck And The Log.

Good communicators know humor gives comic relief. Pressure on, then pressure off. Serious material is woven in with lighter, which is just what Jesus does in the next section, verses 3 through 5. He backs them up against the Last Judgment in verses 1 and 2, then takes them into the carpenter's shop for a good laugh.

For decades Jesus had been a builder and woodworker in Nazareth, and likely in nearby Sepphoris, a sophisticated new city.⁹ No goggles in those days. Jesus knew the annoyance of getting a piece of shavings in his eye. It hurt; the more you rubbed it the worse it got. Often you couldn't get it out without help. The one you asked to perform minor eye surgery had better see well, or they could do more damage than

⁸ James Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1988), 311.

⁹ See Richard Batey, *Jesus And The Forgotten City* (Century One Media, 2000).

good. So when Jesus asked, “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?” everyone smiled.

For years Charles Schultz, creator of *Peanuts*, used the same tactics. In one episode Linus has his security blanket in place and his thumb resting in his mouth; he looks troubled. Turning to Lucy, he asked, “Why are you always so anxious to criticize me?”

“I just think I have a knack for seeing other people’s faults.”

Linus threw up his hands, “What about your own faults?”

Without hesitation, Lucy explained, “I have a knack for overlooking them.”¹⁰

Which is precisely the answer to Jesus’ question, the operative words being *see* and *notice*. Sin distorts our perception of ourselves and others; it impairs our cognition. “Why do you *see* the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not *notice* the log that is in your own?” And what we *see*, we often *say*, “Or how can you *say* to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye, when there is a log in your own?’”

In one of the early communities of Christian monks in the Egyptian desert a brother committed a serious sin. The council met and requested the Teacher to attend. When he refused to come, they sent an urgent delegation.

“Since you insist,” he said, “I will come in half an hour.”

When he arrived, the Teacher entered the room carrying a leaking water jug on his back. Members of the council asked, “Teacher, what is this?”

“All day long,” he replied, “my sins run out behind me and I am unaware of them. Yet despite my blindness to my own sin, today I am asked to judge the error of another.”

When they saw what he was saying, they forgave the brother and said no more.¹¹

It’s not that the brother did need correction and help. He did. Only that they rushed to judgment without first taking time for self-correction before God.

While visiting a neighbor, five-year-old Andrew pulled out his kindergarten class picture and began describing each classmate. “This is Robert; he hits everyone.

¹⁰ *Our Daily Bread*, August 4, 1991.

¹¹ Edited from William White, *Stories for the Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988), 47.

This is Stephen. He never listens to the teacher. This is Mark. He chases us and is very noisy." "And this is me. I'm just sitting here minding my own business."¹²

We are Lucy. We are the desert monks. We are little Andrew. We are laughing at others, but Jesus is laughing at us. And we deserve it. "You hypocrites," he says to his closest friends, "You bunch of mask-makers. First take the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to help your brother with the speck."

Jesus' words are meant to sting so we remember them every time a judgmental thought crosses our mind or breaks the sound barrier of our lips. It's not that a brother or sister does not need help with failings big and small; their life may be in danger, and maybe the brother or sister is me! It is that the one to help them must be merciful and first see them the way God does, through eyes of love and truth, and that takes time to develop and only comes through introspection with God's help. Most small issues we should simply overlook, but when they are so destructive that they cannot be ignored without doing greater damage, we should first look at ourselves and let the Lord perform eye surgery on us first. Only then— and who knows how long this will take in self-examination and repentance— are we ready, if the Lord allows, to go to another with correction and the offer of help. Leo Tolstoy wrote, "Everybody thinks of changing the world, and nobody thinks of changing himself."¹³

During the 1930's a woman came asking the great Mahatma Gandhi to get her little boy to stop eating sugar; it was doing him harm. He gave a cryptic reply: "Please come back next week."

The woman left puzzled but returned a week later. The Mahatma said to the young fellow, "Please don't eat sugar. It is not good for you." Then he joked with the boy for a while, gave him a hug, and sent him on his way.

The mother, unable to contain her curiosity, lingered behind, "Why didn't you say this last week when we came? Why did you make us come back again?"

Gandhi smiled. "Last week," he said, "I too was eating sugar."¹⁴

There can only be healing discipline in the church to the same extent that there

¹² PreachingToday.com search under Mt. 7:1-6.

¹³ Albert M. Wells, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 180.

¹⁴ Located at www.salsa.net/peace/conv/8weekconv2-3.html

is love and a sense we are all in this spiritual growth thing together. Perhaps there was a time when discipline was abused and became overly intrusive, but in our day it is all but neglected.¹⁵ One of the marks of the early Methodists was their class meetings where they practiced self-examination, mutual correction, watched over one another in love, and kept each other on the royal road of salvation.¹⁶ Each week they asked questions like, “How is it with your soul?” and “What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?” Now we gossip and ignore problems and dare not speak because it’s not our job anyway, and all the while people drift farther away from the faith they once believed. How is that love?

The recovery of the discipline we need is dependent on a recovery of love which is dependent on us getting close enough to one another on a regular basis to uncover one another’s gifts and see one another’s sins, and that only happens in small groups that weave their lives together over time. An hour on Sunday is not enough to build Christian community. A gathering is not a movement. Much of what people go to professional counselors for could be handled in face-to-face groups where love was real and accountability and support genuine. We need each other in order to follow Christ. The worst of individualism is killing us. We are afraid to be found out. But when we go to Christ, he binds us to himself and sets us in the midst of others who are on the way.

Obedying verse 3 through 5 would change every life in this room. If every time a critical word crossed your mind or lips you went before God, “Lord, first show me where I’m wrong.” It’s precisely what Jesus advised all his followers, and it’s a revolutionary way to live. What would this do to struggling marriages? To conflicted neighbors? To old grudges? To divided churches?

¹⁵ See the four part series by Marlin Jeschke, “How Discipline Died,” www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/008.

¹⁶ On the Methodist class meeting, see Philip Hardt, *The Soul of Methodism* (New York: University Press of America, 2000). For contemporary adaptations, see Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley’s Class Meeting* (Nappanee, Indiana: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), Denise Stringer, *How Is It With Your Soul?* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2004), Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting* (Wilmore, KY: Seedbed, 2014), Laura Bartels Felleman, *The Form and Power of Religion: John Wesley On Methodist Vitality* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012).

a') v.6 The Continuing Necessity Of Discernment.

You and I live in a world of *either/or* thinking. Either *this* or *that*, which is it? We are leery of paradox, allergic to mystery, and resistant to ambiguity. But not Jesus. As a Jewish mystic he was as comfortable with *both/and* thinking as we are uncomfortable. At the beginning he said *Judge not* and gave reasons; at the end he said *Be sure to judge* and gave reasons. Well, which was it? Only the wise know.

Verse 1 is clear, “Judge not,” but in the parallel section in verse 6 Jesus says, “Either judge or get abused by people who trample like pigs and attack like dogs.” And if you asked him, “Which is it?” the answer is *both*. The truth is found not in the one or the other but in the right use of each at the right time, and that requires skills like discernment and an openness to the illuminations of the Holy Spirit. We are not to assume God’s throne and issue final pronouncements; but neither does that relieve us from exploring the resistance and receptivity of whoever stands before us. Tolerance and humility is not the same as moral indifference. Not all moral evaluations are condemning, but to tell one from the other takes practice. In the courts it’s *judicial temperament*; in the church it’s the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

There are some, Jesus says, who are so hardened to the knowledge of God it’s counter-productive— even dangerous— to work with them until they are made more receptive by the work of the Spirit readying them through pain and consequences. No Jewish priest would give meat off the sacrificial altar to a pack of mangy street dogs.¹⁷ It would mark him as a man without judgment. Only an idiot would throw pearls in front of pigs instead of acorns. It would mark him as a fool. Do not engage such people and thus reveal your own lack of understanding. Be a witness, but don’t be a fool. Pray for them. Wait for receptivity to increase, but do not expose yourself to their verbal or physical violence. Leave them to the dealings of God. And in this sense you are judging them as *not yet receptive*. *Pigs* and *dogs* were derogatory terms Jews used for Gentile pagans, and that is where some are today: at the level of animal appetites and behaving as such. Unaware of God. Food and drink and sex and sleep and fun and drugs and themselves are all they consider. Spiritually they are swine and canines, and of them Jesus said without apology:

¹⁷ Charles Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount* (Columbia, SC: USC Press, 2004), 134.

“Do not give to dogs what is holy,
and do not throw your pearls before swine,
lest they trample them under foot,
and turn to attack you.”

Some are this deep in the devil’s grip and bondage of their sins. Some have to hit bottom— perhaps more than once— before their sin-dulled consciences come to life again. Perhaps you know someone like this; perhaps you’ve been such a person. Our time is to be spent mainly with the receptive, with those God has prepared. We wait on green fruit; we do not try to pick it ahead of its time. The message of Jesus is to be attractively displayed, not force fed to the resistant and angry.

The story is told is told of a farmer who received a visit from one of his city relatives. Before dinner the farmer bowed his head and said grace. His relative jeered, "This is old-fashioned; nobody with an education prays at the table anymore.”

The farmer admitted his practice was old and even allowed there were some on his farm who did not pray before eating.

His relative chuckled, “Enlightenment has now reached the farm! Who are these wise ones?”

“My pigs,” the farmer replied.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

I have written a summary of these six verses to read each morning for the next week:

I am not the judge; God is. Ignorance leads to arrogance, so beware. Verse 1.

God may be as hard and unreasonable with me as I am with others. Verse 2.

God will me as merciful with me as I am with others. Verse 2 again.

Because I don’t see so good, and since I see you better than me, I need regular, private, eye exams with God. Only love sees 20/20. Verses 3 and 4.

If my brother or sister does not welcome my gentle help for minor flaws, then

¹⁸ Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited*, 483.

Matthew 7:1-6 15

I may not have yet spent enough time alone with God. Doctors are a relief to the sick, even if pain is involved. Verse 5.

If it oinks and barks, don't preach to it but keep praying! It is finally not your responsibility. Only God can crack tough nuts. Verse 6.

That's all I know to say. You ponder the mystery and figure the rest out with God. Let me know how it works. I need the help. You see, I have a log in my eye.

