

# PRACTICING JUDGMENT

MATTHEW 7:6

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**T**ODAY I WILL CONCLUDE A THREE-PART SERIES OF sermons on the subject of judging other people. For me, this has been one of the most difficult series of sermons I have ever prepared. Preparing these sermons has forced me to consider some very ugly things about fallen human nature in general and it has also forced me to consider some very ugly things about my own fallen nature in particular.

Judging other people and being judged by other people are things that will happen whether we like it or not. In fact they should happen. As Christians, it is our duty to engage in the activity of trying to determine where other people are at in their relationships with God and with truth. Parents need to do this with their children, and we should do it with each other as well.

There are two reasons why we must try our best to judge where people are at in their relationships with God. One reason is so that discipline can be implemented when discipline is needed. When children do things that are wrong and they are not disciplined, the results to the home are devastating. And the same thing is true in a church. When people in a church do things that are wrong and go unchecked, the church will eventually be destroyed. We must judge other people so that discipline can be implemented when it is necessary. The other reason we must engage in judging where people are at in their relationships to God and truth is so we can choose the correct methods of helping those people grow in their relationships with God. As Christians, it is our duty to share truth to everyone with whom we come into contact. We are meant to be spiritual lights in this world. But, how can we share truth in a way that people will respond unless we first exercise some kind of judgment whereby we assess where people are at in their relationship with truth? We all need to judge and we all need to be judged.

But, we all have a huge problem. We all have an ugly side of our nature that drives us to judge people in ways that only God can judge them. We have a tendency to play God and do things we were never intended to do. And, we all have an ugly pride that blinds us from seeing our own need to be judged and to be helped by those who are judging us. Preparing this series of sermons has not been easy, because it has forced me to think about the ugly side of other people as well as the ugly side of myself.

**A**LLOW ME TO QUICKLY REVIEW THE GROUND THAT HAS been covered so far. In the first sermon I preached, I tried to define the right and wrong ways to judge other people. We are engaging ourselves in the right kind

of judgment when we attempt to discern where people are at in their relationship to truth. Consider the people with whom you come into contact on a regular basis. Are they in total rebellion against God? Do they claim to be Christian and, at the same time, openly and deliberately sin without any desire to confess and repent? Are they receptive to learning new truth? Do they desire to share truth with other people? By attempting to answer these questions, we are taking the first steps in the process of judging people the right way. The process is then completed when we make decisions and take action based on the answers to these kinds of questions.

We judge people the wrong way when we begin to think that we are more righteous than they. And, we judge people the wrong way when we take joy in finding faults in other people. We also judge people the wrong way when we pronounce people who claim to be innocent guilty until they have proven their innocence or when we judge their motives or when we condemn them to hell.

These are the concepts I tried to get across in the first sermon. Then, last week I shared three good reasons why we should avoid judging people the wrong way. When we judge people the wrong way, God will judge us, and He will use the same standards we used in judging other people to judge us. Those are two reasons why we must avoid judging people the wrong way. The last reason is that we are completely unqualified to judge people in a condemning way, so we shouldn't even try.

After hearing about all these reasons, some of us may be tempted to think it safer to stay out of the business of judging people altogether. So, I am thankful that Jesus did not end His teaching on this subject with these three warnings. Instead, Jesus ended His teaching by emphasizing our duty to judge people in the right way.

If it were wrong for Christians to judge other people altogether, then MATTHEW 7:6 would be totally out of place. Right after Jesus gave three reasons why we should not judge people the wrong way, we come to MATTHEW 7:6 which quotes Jesus as saying, **"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 then turn and tear you to pieces."** These words of our Lord instruct us to practice judgment in a particular way and it is important that we take some time to understand their meaning.

In my past two sermons I have already mentioned church discipline as one particular way of practicing

judgment on other people. The Bible instructs us to take certain action against those who refuse to confess their sin and repent. But, the subject of MATTHEW 7:6 does not deal with church discipline; rather, it deals with how we communicate truth to other people. After we assess where a certain person is in his relationship to truth, we must then adjust the way we communicate truth to that person based on the results of our assessment. I believe this is the basic principle being taught in MATTHEW 7:6. It is clearly a command to practice judging people in the right way.

**N**OW LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE COMMAND. **"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 then turn and tear you to pieces."** It is generally accepted among Bible teachers that the sacred thing and the pearls mentioned in this verse are one and the same. They both represent truth. The major difficulty that people have with this verse has to do with the meaning of the dogs and the pigs and not the meaning of the pearls and sacred things. What kind of people do these dogs and pigs represent?

Some have suggested that they represent non-Christians. But, it is ridiculous to think that Jesus would tell us that we are forbidden to share truth to non-Christians. That would not only contradict the strong teaching in both Old and New Testaments to share truth to people outside of God's kingdom, it would also contradict Christ's own behavior. Jesus, himself, constantly shared truth to people who were outside of God's kingdom.

So, then, what does Jesus mean when He tells us not to give truth to the dogs and the pigs? Let's answer this question by observing Jesus as He went about imparting truth to people. When we read the four gospels, we discover that Jesus never handled any two people in the exact same way. Although His love for everyone was the same and His goal to help everyone understand more truth was the same, the way He communicated the truth was different. In the Gospel of JOHN we read how Jesus dealt with Nathaniel and Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria. With each person He used a different approach. The way Jesus communicated to the Pharisees and the way He communicated to the tax collectors was also very different. In LUKE 23:9, we see how Jesus communicated with King Herod after the king had asked him many questions. Basically, He said nothing. But, in LUKE 23:3, after Pilot asked Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, **"Yes, it is as you say."** Now why did Jesus share that truth to Pilot and say nothing at all in response to Herod's questions? Could it have something to do with the fact that Herod, who should have known better, was driven by a morbid curiosity to see Jesus perform signs and wonders rather than a true desire to know truth?

As far as our Lord's love for people and His desire for people to understand truth is concerned, there is no discrimination at all. But, as far as His timing and His method of communicating truth to people, we find a great deal of discrimination.

And, the same is true when we read about the ministry of the apostles in the book of ACTS. When it was obvious that people did not want to hear the truth, the apostles made adjustments in their strategies. This is illustrated in the words recorded in ACTS 13:16: "Then Paul and Barnabus answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.'"

From these and other examples I must conclude that the dogs and the pigs talked about in MATTHEW 7:6 represent anyone who, after hearing a certain truth, will take that truth and trample it under their feet. When I say "anyone" I mean it doesn't matter if the person in question claims to be a Christian or not. Once we have determined a certain person will take the particular truth we are sharing and reject it and trample it and even use it to do us harm, then we must adjust the way we communicate to that person. We need to judge people so we can know the right way to approach them.

Now, in practical terms, what does all this mean? I would now like to suggest five practical lessons we can learn from this principle.

First of all, I believe we can logically conclude that using a mechanical approach to share truth tends to violate the command Jesus is giving us. Telemarketers offend very many people these days. But, telemarketing companies really don't care, because they assume that only a small percent of everyone they call will purchase their product. It doesn't matter that much to them if 95% of the people they call are offended. All they need is a very few percent of people to respond in order to make a profit.

Now some people take the same approach to sharing truth. They are intent on reaching a certain numerical goal in a certain amount of time, so they package the truth in a certain way and distribute it in large quantities hoping for a certain return.

But, as Christians, we must be different than the telemarketing companies. We must be sensitive to every individual person we are talking to. When we deliberately and knowingly offend a large number of people just so we can reach a few people with the least amount of effort, then we are violating the command that tells us not to take that which is precious and give it in such a way that it will be trampled upon.

This thought leads me to a second practical lesson we can learn from MATTHEW 7:6. It is this: We need to discern the ability people have to receive truth. When Jesus tells us not to pass on truth to other people in a way that will cause them to become offended, it reminds us that everyone is created with an ability to understand truth. Over time, that ability either increases or decreases depending on what we do with the truth we possess. We must exercise judgment to find out where the ability level is with each individual.

Sometimes when I begin to talk about spiritual things I am able to sense an uncomfortable feeling on the part of the listener. Sometimes the listener will make an obvious effort to look away from me or change the subject. These should all be clues to me that that the truth I am sharing is going beyond the limits of that person's present ability to receive truth. Rather than pressing the point, it is wise to take a different approach. While living in Taiwan, I learned quickly how foolish it is to tell people right off that idol worship is a sin. Instead, I needed to work at discovering what truth they were able to accept. In 1 CORINTHIANS 3:2 the apostle Paul wrote, "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it." In our attempts to help other people grow in their relationships with God, we must work to discover their present ability to understand truth and start at that point.

A third lesson I want to emphasize is that some people will reject the truth we present to them regardless of how we present it. Even if we do everything perfect, sometimes the truth will still be trampled. It happened to Jesus, and it will happen to us.

So our main goal is not to avoid ever offending people. It is to avoid intentionally offending people or offending people just because we are too lazy to take the time out to judge where they are at in their relationship to God and truth. We are not responsible for the outcome when we have done our best to discern where people are at and adjust our witness to match where people are in their spiritual walk with God. But when we do not do our part to assess the situation and make the proper judgment, then we must assume responsibility for the outcome.

A fourth lesson is that we need to be humble when we exercise the kind of judgment that Jesus mentions in MATTHEW 7:6. We must keep in mind the fact that any man, when stretched beyond his limit, will become like a dog or a pig. Besides Jesus Christ Himself, has

their ever been a human being who will always embrace any truth that comes his way? Our Lord knows everything about us. He knows exactly the level of truth we are able to handle. He knows how to lead us step by step in our spiritual growth. But, when we begin to think we can handle anything and our pride swells, then God will allow us to be humbled. He will confront us with something that we are unable to handle. The plank in our own eye, that is the pride in our own life, will make it impossible for us to embrace the truth that is before us. We will become like the dogs and the pigs that Jesus mentioned in MATTHEW 7:6. All of us have this weakness. All of us can and do suppress truth. All of us sin. Let's admit it. Let us remain humble.

And this leads me to the fifth and final practical lesson I will emphasize in this message. You see the status of being a dog or a pig is not a permanent status in people—that is with one exception. When a certain person blasphemes the Holy Spirit and loses his ability to embrace truth altogether, that person becomes a permanent dog or pig. And let's remember that only God can judge when a person has committed the unpardonable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

But, anyone who has not blasphemed the Holy Spirit—that is anyone who has any ability to comprehend truth—may move in and out of the status of being a spiritual dog or pig who will reject and trample the truth. We must be aware of this. Circumstances can change our status. I once met a person who was strongly opposed to abortion and actively involved in anti-abortion activity until the day when her own teenage daughter became pregnant. In a very short time, her whole attitude toward the Biblical teaching on abortion changed.

**"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 then turn and tear you to pieces."** These are the words that bring our Lord's teaching about judging other people to a close. They are words that encourage us to remain engaged in judging people in the right way. In MATTHEW 7:1-6 Jesus, in effect says, 'Don't judge, but do judge.' We now should understand it to mean, don't judge in the wrong way, but do judge in the right way. The key is balance. It is a balance that is very difficult to keep. But, our own spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of the entire church depend on us keeping this balance. May God grant us the grace to keep a balance as we deal with the souls of other people.