

Sunday, July 28, 2019

This sermon is the 8th in a series of sermons I've been doing on the "Sermon on the Mount" found in Matthew 5-7. I've been using the following as a high-level summary:

1. Our essential characteristics (what we are) – vv. 5:3-12
2. Our function in the world – vv. 5:13-16
3. Our relationship to the law – vv. 5:17-48
4. Our religious life – vv. 6:1-18
5. Our mundane life – vv. 6:19-34
- 6. Our relationship to other people – vv. 7:1-12**
7. Being doers and not hearers only – vv. 7:13-27

In this Sermon, Christ has been going over every aspect of our lives, and what is expected for the citizens of His kingdom. We have gone over what we are (the beatitudes), what our function in the world is to be, how we relate to the Word of God and His law, how we live our religious lives, and how we live our mundane lives in this world. Today, I intend to go over how we are expected to behave in relation to other people. If everyone followed what Christ tells us in these twelve verses (Matthew 7:1-12), there would be no more crime, no more conflict, no more war, no more lying, no more envy, no more malice, etc. The sad fact, though, is that men are so corrupt and depraved, that they don't have the capacity or the interest to do what Christ tells us here. And the sadder fact is that we, as Christians, even though we DO, through the Holy Spirit, have the capacity and the interest to do what He's telling us, we miserably fail at it more often than we succeed. In fact, as we've gone through this Sermon on the Mount, I feel like I have woefully fallen short on the whole thing. I assume that most of you feel the same, and would suggest that if you don't, you are delusional and are in desperate need of examining yourself.

Here is the text of today's passage:

"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam [is] in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and

he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7:1-12)

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Based on my experience, I would say that this verse is in the top three of the most abused verses in the Bible (the other two being John 3:16 and 1 John 4:8). The primary meaning that people have when they quote this verse is, “you are never allowed to tell me under any circumstances that I’m doing anything wrong, because I want to continue in my rebellion against God with no restrictions.” If you suggest that a proud sinner is sinning against God, the proud sinner, who doesn’t care one whit about God’s commandments, will piously say, “Judge not.” The only thing more vile than that is when a phony Christian tells you to “judge not” on behalf of the proud sinner. Of course, that particular interpretation of the verse is ridiculous for at least the following reasons:

1. On its very face, telling someone to “judge not” is in and of itself a judgment. In other words, nobody can tell you to “judge not” without being guilty of judging you, if the meaning is “you can never judge under any circumstances.”
2. It is contrary to the points that Jesus is making in this very passage. In verse 5, He commands us to “first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” In other words, He’s commanding us to clean up our own act before helping our brother. If we’re never allowed to judge, how can we cast the mote out of our brother’s eye? In verse 6, He commands us to not give holy things unto the dogs or cast pearls before swine. How can this commandment be fulfilled without making a judgment about who the dogs and swine are?
3. It is contrary to what He teaches in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. For example, Matthew 5:20 tells us that “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” And Matthew 7:15 says, “Beware of false prophets.” How are these statements at all useful if we aren’t allowed to determine what the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is, or assess who the false prophets are?
4. It is contrary to what He teaches elsewhere in the gospels. “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” (John 7:24).
5. It is contrary to the teachings of the rest of scripture. For example:
 - a. There is a scriptural requirement for church discipline. How can we judge whether a brother “walketh disorderly” (2 Thessalonians 3:6) or “put away from

- among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Corinthians 5:13) if we aren’t allowed to make such judgments about people?
- b. We must be discriminating when it comes to heresy and heretics. Paul says in Galatians 1 that if anyone preaches any other gospel than what he has preached, “let him be accursed.” Paul also tells us that “a man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3:10). How can we do these things if we aren’t allowed to identify heresies?
 - c. We are commanded to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” (2 Timothy 4:2). You will be hard-pressed to reprove, rebuke or exhort someone without first assessing the situation and making a judgment.
 - d. We are commanded to love our neighbor, and Leviticus 19 defines that as confronting him when we see him sin: “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I *am* the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:17-18). If we allow him to continue in sin without saying anything, then we hate him. This requires judgment on our part.

I could go on and on, but I don’t want to belabor the point. The bottom line is that Christ does not mean that you are never to judge under any circumstances. We are rational creatures – we can think, we can look at the Bible as our standard, we can look at evidence, we can assess what we’re seeing, and we can draw conclusions. And in fact, we **MUST** do those things if we’re going to be obedient to scripture.

At this point, I’ve told you what it doesn’t mean. But the more important question to us is what **DOES** it mean? And I believe that His message here is that you are not supposed to judge with a censorious spirit. Just like in the rest of this sermon, Christ is more concerned here about the matters of the heart and the underlying spirit behind our behavior. On May 8 and 15, 2016, Steve did a two-part sermon on this very passage entitled as follows: [A Censorious Spirit – Part 1](#) and [A Censorious Spirit – Part 2](#). I highly recommend that everyone review those two sermons, as he went into great detail on Matthew 7:1-12, and you can find a lot of edifying information there that I am not going to repeat here. Another resource that would be of great benefit is called “The Spirit of Love the Opposite of a Censorious Spirit” by Jonathan Edwards, in which he goes into some discussion on Matthew 7. What do I mean by a censorious spirit?

- It is a spirit of self-righteousness, where you have decided that you are the standard by which all others should be measured.

- It is a condemning and prideful spirit, where you have set yourself up as judge, jury and executioner, to the point where you have usurped the throne of God.
- It is a spirit of superiority, where you despise and have contempt for other people.
- It is a hypercritical spirit, where you are critical for the sheer pleasure of being critical. A person with a censorious spirit loves to find fault in others – they secretly hope for it and have a malicious satisfaction when they can uncover it.
- It is a hypocritical spirit, where you put your grave face on and hide behind a veneer of false righteousness, holiness, piousness, compassion, or tears, while your real reason is a joyful malice, or envy, or some other sin – you’re not really interested in helping the person, but rather in indulging your own ulterior motives.

A censorious spirit often shows itself in one or more of the following ways (not exhaustive):

- Fixating on indifferent things (see Romans 14).
- Imputing motives to someone, when you have no evidence to do so.
- Rushing to a judgment without knowing all the facts – and in fact, such a spirit does not want to know all the facts and circumstances, because it delights in mercilessness. (This is folly and shame - see Proverbs 18:13). Someone who has already made their mind up on a matter will interpret everything he sees in such a way that it reinforces the judgment that he’s already made.
- Magnifying sins and faults in others, while minimizing, excusing, rationalizing, and justifying the same (or worse) sins and faults in yourself.
- Applying a standard to someone else that you’d never apply to yourself.
- Focusing on the bad qualities in a person and ignoring their good qualities.
- Spinning the facts, taking statements out of context, or making accusations for which you have no evidence, to make somebody look as bad as possible.
- Being quick to believe and perpetuate gossip about somebody.
- Unwillingness to forgive.

I think we all know by experience what this looks like. I think we’ve all been guilty of this, both to one another, and to those without this church. I also think that we have made great strides here, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to walk more like Christ. As Paul told the Thessalonians, “As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.” (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). In other words, “you’re doing it, but do more of it.”

So, this passage isn’t merely about making a judgment...it’s about the spirit behind making the judgment. As noted above, we can’t follow the scripture without making judgments...the

judgments just need to be made with a spirit of charity, sobriety, and reluctance (i.e., they shouldn't be made with glee), while not forsaking truth, reason, and righteousness.

I would also note that this passage also applies to the person who is being judged (particularly if the judgment is true and is being made with a proper spirit). Oftentimes a person who is on the receiving end of a rebuke, reproof, or exhortation, for example, will take refuge behind this passage so they can feel justified in continuing with their sin, and they will respond with a censorious spirit of their own towards their rebuker. "That guy rebuking me has ulterior motives. He doesn't have any business judging me. Judge not, lest you be judged. Besides, he's a hypocrite – he also sins – in fact, he's a way worse sinner than I am. He's just trying to point my sins out to make himself feel better." People can really get into self-righteous mode very quickly when applying this passage to someone else.

Moving on, "Judge not" – why? – "that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." When I see this verse, the verse that immediately pops into my mind is:

"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." (James 2:13)

That verse scares me. If we don't show mercy in our judgments, then we will have judgment without mercy. Imagine facing a just God who is under no obligation to have mercy on you. A secondary meaning of Christ here might be that men will judge us the same way that we judge them – if we are censorious towards men, they will be censorious back to us. That is true, and it is very common – in fact, the most censorious people tend to be the most outraged when someone responds to them in kind because they're so blind to their own sin. But I'm a lot more interested in the judgment of God, and I believe that that is the primary meaning here. God will judge us with the same judgment that we judged other people; He will judge by the same standard that we judged. If we are merciless, He will be merciless. If we claim that we're the world's foremost experts on the Word of God, and then judge censoriously, God will judge us according to what we claimed to be, by the strict standard of His justice – "that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." (Luke 12:47).

The question arises here, what kind of judgment by God is He talking about? Our eternal destiny – heaven or hell? Temporal judgment here on earth ("For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" – Hebrews 12:6)? The judgment of our works on the judgment day? ("For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done,

whether it be good or bad.” – 2 Corinthians 5:10). This is an important question, and I don’t think that we need to restrict it to just one of those things – but I do know that if we’re talking about regenerated people here (God’s elect), we can’t lose our salvation...but we’re going to lose something. We’re going to be on the receiving end of a judgment of God. So to me, today, as we talk about judging with an uncharitable spirit, what’s even a more important question is the very practical question: “Am I going to get my act together and stop having a censorious spirit? Or am I going to incur the judgment of God (in whatever form that judgment happens to come)?”

So, we see these first few verses, and we may say, “ok then – I’m not going to risk it - I’m never going to say another word to anyone again.” But of course, that’s not right. We’re still expected to help our brother – but we need to judge ourselves first. If we consider our own hearts and sins and are as hard on ourselves (preferably harder) than we are on others, then, and only then, will we be in a proper state to be useful to our brother. If we’re really as concerned with righteousness, truth, purity, and holiness as we like to believe we are, then we ought to be applying those standards to ourselves first, and at least in the same measure as we apply them to others. This is the illustration that Christ uses in verses 3-5: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest [“learn thoroughly, examine carefully, meditate on, scrutinize”] not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

A mote is a very small piece of wood, or straw, or chaff. A beam is a big piece of timber. We all know what it’s like to get a little piece of debris in our eye – it’s very irritating and can be quite debilitating, it takes care and patience to remove it, and even once it’s gone, it can take some time for your eye to heal back up. I don’t think any of us has ever experienced having a 2x4 stuck in our eye – the very image is comical. But the message is clear – how can you help your brother when you’re in a state where you can’t help your brother? There are a lot of theories about what that beam represents, but I’ll cut to the chase – it’s your censorious spirit. Your arrogant, self-righteous, condemning, superior, hypercritical, hypocritical spirit. One of the most painful exercises that you can ever go through is to be honest with yourself about what lies beneath your judgments. Once you come face to face with that and are humbled by it, you will have the right spirit to actually be helpful to your brother. That doesn’t mean that he’s always going to appreciate your help like he ought to – but at least you’re doing it the way you’re supposed to be doing it. Of course, this doesn’t mean that you have to throw all reason and discernment aside. That’s why Christ tempers all of this with verse 6: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”

We have a duty to figure out who the dogs and the swine are, and not give them holy things and pearls. So, what are dogs, what are swine, what are the holy things, and what are pearls? Dogs and swine were both unclean animals under the ceremonial law of Moses (see Leviticus 11:4-8, 27). When we talk about dogs, we're not talking about the family pet – we're talking about vicious, dangerous, wild animals that would roam in packs and feed on garbage and carrion. And anyone who has ever stepped foot anywhere near a pig farm knows that swine are particularly filthy creatures who will trample whatever is in their way so they can root through some mire just to get to an acorn. Of course, Christ isn't talking about animals – he's talking about wicked humans. And the holy things and pearls that He is talking about are none other than the precious truths of God – the gospel of Jesus Christ. These are the type of people who despise the truth of God, and respond to it with contempt, violence and blasphemy. Once we see these individuals for what they are, why continue to give them an opportunity to reproach Jesus Christ? "He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot." (Proverbs 9:7). The following passages may be instructive regarding that dreadful decree of God when He withholds the preaching of the gospel and any hope for repentance:

"Ephraim *is* joined to idols: let him alone." (Hosea 4:17)

"And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city." (Matthew 10:13-15)

"And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." (Matthew 13:58)

"Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (Matthew 15:14)

"For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame." (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Regarding this last passage, if there was ever a group of people who would fall in the dog and swine category, it would be them. They have no hope of repentance. They will always be dogs and hogs. They have seen the glory of Christ, have come to an understanding of Him, have

embraced Him in a superficial manner, and have rejected Him, setting themselves up as His enemies. It's a sin to give holy things and pearls to them – you're opening up the door as wide as you can and are inviting and encouraging them to put Christ to an open shame.

We can't be censorious, but we also can't be undiscerning. In an effort to not be censorious, we might be too light and easy, or, God forbid, allow proud sin and false doctrine to take hold in the church – having a charitable spirit does not mean that we toss the holy standards of God to the side. Or we might have some Pollyanna notion that if we keep running our mouths, we might just be able to reform the Devil. In an effort to identify dogs and hogs, we might be too aggressive and unfairly, unmercifully, or prematurely identify people as such, and withhold help that they desperately need. Those are our two guardrails – not being censorious and having discernment - but it is very difficult to not cross those and go into the ditch. Nay, it is impossible to not go into the ditch, without the Holy Spirit. That's why the next thing Christ talks about is prayer:

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matthew 7:7-11)

When I see this passage, I think of another passage out of James:

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all [men] liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man [is] unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:5-8)

This passage in Matthew is not a blank check where we can ask for whatever we feel like asking for, and God will give it to us. That's not the lesson here. That's not the lesson ANYWHERE in scripture. The context is in dealing with other people – we need wisdom to know how to deal with different people in different situations. We need wisdom to know when we've gone too far in one direction or the other. We need wisdom to have the proper mixture of charity and discernment. I believe that's what the thing is that we should be asking, seeking, and knocking about. It's too difficult to do this on our own – we need wisdom from God. And when God says, “Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” (Psalm 27:8).

We have reassuring language from our Savior here. If human fathers, even though we are evil by nature (i.e., total depravity), will give good gifts to our children, how much more will our heavenly Father give us good things? In the sister passage in Luke 11, it says, “how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Now we’re getting to the bottom of what this means. We’re talking about the gifts and graces of the Spirit. We’re talking about the “spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” that the Father has blessed us with (Ephesians 1:3). God is in possession of an infinite supply of spiritual blessings with which He can bless us, such that if we made use of this remedy as we ought to, and are as urgent and persistent as He’s telling us we ought to be here, I’m convinced that we’d never be devoid of the wisdom that we need at the time we need it.

An earthly father would never trick his son and give him a stone when he was asking for bread to eat – God would never trick us either. An earthly father would never give his child an unclean, dangerous serpent when he’s asking for a fish – God would likewise never give us something that would be hurtful to us (all things work for our good – Romans 8:28). God is faithful to His promises, and He is our Father. I don’t think we spend enough time considering what that means for God to be our Father. He isn’t a far-off, unapproachable God – He’s our Father. It is by the Spirit of God that we can cry, “Abba, Father” (a term of endearment and close relationship), but instead, we spend an inordinate amount of our lives living as if He’s not even there. As you go about your day-to-day lives, consider how infrequently you remember that you’re doing it all in His presence! Nevertheless, He loves us, cares for us, protects us, nourishes us, provides for us, disciplines us, teaches us, listens to us, answers us, helps us, guides us, etc.

This section sums up with what is commonly referred to as “the golden rule”:

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)

This verse can easily be, and frequently is, misinterpreted to justify sinful behavior. For example, “I want people to tell me that my sin is OK, so I’m going to tell them that their sin is OK.” Or, “I want people to fornicate with me, so I’m going to fornicate with them.” Those would be a violation of the second greatest commandment, which is to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” The verse must be read in light of the standards of God, not our own made-up standards. Otherwise, it’s every man for himself and everyone gets to make up his own rule.

Some version of this “golden rule” is found in almost every religion and culture throughout the history of the world – this is one of the laws written on the hearts of men. Often, it is put in the negative form of “don’t treat people in a way that you wouldn’t want to be treated

yourself.” For example, Confucius said, “Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.” Hillel said, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.” Those are absolutely true. But Jesus gives us the positive form: “whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” People like the negative form because it’s a lot easier than the positive form. With the negative form, all you have to do is avoid doing stuff – if you don’t want someone to retaliate, then avoid things that would result in retaliation. But the positive form is hard. You actually have to take action. The idea is to put yourself in the other person’s shoes, and ask the question, “If I was in that person’s situation, how would I expect to be treated by an impartial, fair, righteous, just, merciful person?” And then treat them that way. We can’t lower the standard. We can’t cast truth, holiness and mercy aside. We can’t be undiscerning. But we can, and must, go about it with the right spirit.

Note that it doesn’t say “all things whatsoever men do to you, do ye even so to them” – it says “all things whatsoever YE WOULD THAT men SHOULD do to you, do ye even so to them.” In other words, howsoever men SHOULD treat you is how you should treat them. And as mentioned above, it’s not based on our whims – it’s based on the truth of God. It’s not merely what I WISH somebody would do, but what my reasonable expectation would be for an impartial and just person to do.

I will give an example related to this church. We have a very public testimony, and by the grace of God, He has opened so many amazing doors for us. And when great and effectual doors are opened, there are many adversaries (1 Corinthians 16:9). And one of the favorite techniques of our chief adversary is to flood the landscape with lies, rumors, calumnies, past sins, gossip, half-truths, and accusations, hoping that if he can defame the messengers, he can stop the power of the message. (The name “Satan” means “adversary”, and the word translated “devil” means “false accuser”). We’ve been witnesses of this from day one, and it’s not a new technique that Satan devised just for us; Jeremiah, for example, dealt with it on a regular basis (see Jeremiah 20:10). Such behavior is condemned in the Old Testament (e.g., Leviticus 19:16). And it’s condemned in the New Testament in multiple places, including in today’s passage (see also, e.g., 2 Corinthians 12:20). We could easily respond in kind, but we must not: “Recompense to no man evil for evil.” (Romans 12:17). If we have occasion to interact with them, we must communicate with them in the manner we know that they OUGHT to be communicating with us – not in the manner they ARE communicating with us.

And why should we follow this “golden rule”? Because it is pleasing to God – it is a summary of the entire scripture, as it relates to how we should behave towards other people. It must start with the first great commandment of loving God – otherwise, you’re doing it for all the wrong reasons. And it must be done with a sincere love of your neighbor – not as a sanctimonious display. I love you. Amen.