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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“OF SPECKS AND PLANKS”**  
Matthew 7:1-5

☑ {Adam Hamilton} Quote: **“Some of the most insensitive, critical, judgmental, and mean-spirited people I’ve known were persons who claimed to be committed Christians.”** Ouch!

The perception of Christians as sharp-tongued criticizers might well be *exaggerated*, but it is *not baseless*. Many churchgoers are quick to condemn and slow to show mercy, as though being correct is more important than being humble, patient, gentle, and kind. Some here have torn others to shreds. Lord, have mercy!

By the same token some of the most wishy-washy, undiscerning, irresolute, and indefinite people I’ve known also claim to be Christians.

They strive to be totally nonjudgmental. In their effort to accommodate differences they will affirm almost any belief or behavior, except those they judge to be judgmental. The only offense they refuse to tolerate is intolerance, as they define it. Some here are prone to such insipid, watered-down religion. Lord, have mercy!

Is it only me, or are the clashing voices of hypercritical judgmentalism and indiscriminate approval getting louder and more insistent? We need to hear the voice of the Lord on this!

■ Please turn with me to Matthew chapter 7. Verse 1 begins, **“Do not judge.”**

- At first hearing it sounds like a ringing endorsement of absolute tolerance. Yet in verse 6 Messiah instructs, in no uncertain terms, **“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs.”** Determining **“what is sacred”** and who are **“dogs”** and **“pigs”** requires us to make judgments; what is more, *judgments about other people*.

- And in verses 15-16 Messiah cautions, **“Watch out for false prophets. They come... in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.”** Seeing through **“sheep’s clothing”** to the wolf underneath requires us to make *judgments about other people*.

? **“Do not judge.” “Do not give to dogs ... do not throw pearls to pigs,” “Watch out for false prophets.”** How are we to live in this tension? Shall we judge, or shall we refrain from judging?

📖 The word translated “judge” is the verb κρίνω [krínō]. Κρίνω has a range of overtones. It can imply criticism, denunciation, and condemnation; or it can entail assessment, discernment, and reckoning.

If κρίνω has the reproachful sense, **“Do not judge”** means *do not condemn others*. If it has the prudential sense, **“Do not judge”** means *do not assess people at all*.

{Jas 1:6} Common sense tells us that anyone who makes no assessments whatsoever of other people **“is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”** No one could operate that way for long: they would be lost either to insanity or death.

¶ Common sense is not all we have to go on. In Luke 6:37, the Savior amplifies and clarifies this teaching: **“Do not judge... Do not condemn... Forgive...”**

★ Christ Jesus is not forbidding all moral and spiritual assessment; he is banning the spirit of criticism and the action of condemnation.

Do we bristle against this prohibition? Do we contend that we should be at liberty to criticize freely and condemn without hindrance?

Of course not! I cannot imagine that any sincere believer would dispute this command outright.

Yet I know many who disregard it in practice, some habitually. I myself have disobeyed it.

‡ It is hard to recognize our own critical spirit, and even our overt deeds of condemnation. What does sinful judgment look like in action?

☑ Sinful judgment is looking down your nose at someone who dresses poorly, who struggles with their weight, who has never married, who got divorced, who doesn't believe in Jesus, who is gay, or what have you.

☑ Sinful judgment is defining a person by their sins. It is treating the person who lies as nothing more than a liar, the one who murders as nothing more than a murderer, and so forth.

☑ Sinful judgment is refusing to forgive another, as though their offenses were unforgiveable. It is withholding mercy and help in order to punish them.

☑ Sinful judgment is battering others with degrading words like 'stupid,' 'worthless,' 'garbage.' It is labeling them with derogatory names tied to their gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, or some other category.

☑ Sinful judgment is writing off any human being as a lost cause. It is dismissing them as a sinner who is beyond redemption.

In his mercy, Holy God has given explicit directives about when and whom not to judge.

◆ Romans 2:1: **“You... have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.”**

⚡ The imperative is, do not pass judgment if you are guilty of a similar sin.

{Mt 5:27-28} I have never come close to having an extra-marital affair. Am I free to condemn adulterers? No! Messiah declares: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”**

{Mt 5:21-22} The Lord draws the same connection between murder and sinful anger. The general principal is that inward sin is as wrong as outward sin. Do not deny mercy if you are guilty of a similar sin!

◆ On to Romans 14:1-2: **“Accept those whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.... The one who”** has strong convictions in such issues **“must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and”** vice-versa.

⚡ The imperative is, do not pass judgment in disputable matters.

Fault-finders tend to assume their convictions are not debatable. Even the open-minded disagree

about what is settled. Still, humility and flexibility in secondary issues helps prevent sinful judgments.

♦ Next, First Corinthians 4:5: **“Judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of people’s hearts.”**

✎ The imperative is, do not pass judgment on unspoken motives.

How often does someone speak a careless word, and we react as though they planned it? Could it be that they are just having a bad day?

How often do Progressives accuse those who oppose same-sex marriage of hatred and bigotry? Might not some hold to the traditional definition of matrimony for reasons other than hatred?

How often do Traditionalists speak as though people in the LGBTQ community are dead-set on destroying marriage? Might not they simply desire to experience the social, legal, and economic benefits of marriage?

♦ Now for First Corinthians 5:12-13: **“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? ....God will judge those outside.”**

✎ The imperative is, do not pass judgment on unbelievers.

? {Ro 3:12; 6:23; Eph 2:8} Do you and I believe that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”** *including us?*

? Do we believe **“the wages of [our] sin is death”**?

? Do we believe that **“it is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith – and this [faith] is not from [ourselves], it is the gift of God”**?

? Then how can we condemn those who do not yet have life in Jesus?

Do not pass judgment if you are guilty of a similar sin, in disputable matters, on unspoken motives, and on unbelievers. These imperatives are given for our benefit.

■ Let us hear Matthew 7, verses 1-4 in their entirety:

**“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say, ‘Let me take the speck out of your own eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?”**

It is an absurd image, but it happens every time we judge another for their speck of wrong thinking or wrong doing even as we fail to love God with our entire being, fail to love that other person as we love ourselves, and fail to rely on grace.

Sometimes it is necessary to assess the beliefs, words, and behavior of others. When I do, I must measure mine against the same standard – or, better yet, one that is more exacting. I say “more exacting,” for while I dare not judge their hidden motives I dare not neglect to judge my hidden motives.

■ Finally, verse 5: **“You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person’s eye.”**

{Php 2:12-13} What if I have removed my plank?

Judgmentalism still is not justified. I shall **“continue to work out [my] salvation with fear and trembling, for”** I cannot take credit for my rightness and goodness: **“it is God who works in [me] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”**

Repentance and transformation do not give us a license to condemn! They qualify us to serve others, to seek to grow more like Jesus with them, and to love them patiently, kindly, generously, humbly, sensitively, and unfailingly.

☑ **“Some of the most insensitive, critical, judgmental, and mean-spirited people I’ve known were persons who claimed to be committed Christians.”**

I am quoting a specific pastor – but there are millions, tens of millions, hundreds of millions, inside and outside the Church who would echo his sentiments.

By the power of the grace of God may you and I, individually and as a body, prove them wrong in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Matthew 7:1-5 is the Word of the Lord.