

DON'T JUDGE ME!

MATTHEW 7:1-5

INTRODUCTION

I have nothing to prove but I have an example to set.

The other morning, while running, I was listening to a podcast about a guy who was diagnosed with brain cancer. He decided, even during treatment, that he would become an Ironman triathlete. The Ironman triathlon is a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride, and a 26.2-mile run—all in one day.

This man is not gifted or a natural athlete; he had to work at all three disciplines. Why would he do this? Because of his young daughter. He wanted her to see how to handle adversity. It was less about him becoming an Ironman (which he did), and so much more about setting an example for his daughter about overcoming adversity (which he also did).

I have nothing to prove but I have an example to set.

That's what this man said about it all. Those were his words. Those words really caught my attention and settled into my heart. I've thought about them a lot over the last 2-3 weeks. If we are followers of Christ, then isn't this the way to live?

I have nothing to prove but I have an example to set.

It's true when it comes to adversity, conflict, politics, social media, and a million other things.

I have nothing to prove but I have an example to set.

Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, "Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye," when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

—Matthew 7:1-5 NLT

So says Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. When I hear these words, I think of a story that involves Jesus and judgement, found in John 8. It's the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery.

I'm sure it was set up, and the poor woman was simply a pawn in the plan to destroy Jesus. Early one morning, she was pulled from a bed and dragged through the streets to Jesus who was teaching near the Temple. She was pushed in front of him, probably clutching bed sheets to hide her shame. The angry religious leaders demand Jesus pass judgment on the woman—which means she'll be stoned to death right there.

They know Jesus won't do that, so they think they've caught him in an exploitable inconsistency. As they make their demands for an answer, Jesus stoops down and doodles in the dirt. He ignores them. They insist upon an answer. Jesus says, "He that is without sin, cast the first stone."

Of course, no one throws a single rock—instead, they drop them and walk—because they know no one is sinless, except the one who did not condemn the woman but told her to leave her life of sin.

Jesus didn't have to prove anything that morning, but he sure set an example for us to follow.

DISCUSSION

Judging and judgment is a big deal in our culture. You're not supposed to do it; it's taboo. Questioning someone, challenging someone, or even disagreeing with someone seems to be quickly labeled as judging, as throwing rocks. This seems to be the unpardonable sin in our culture.

Don't judge me!
Quit throwing rocks!
Stop being so judgy!

Aren't these responses—*Don't judge me*, etc.—based on the idea that unless you are perfect, you cannot speak into another person's life? And don't those ideas come from the words and actions of Jesus?

Is that really what he meant, though? I don't think so, but that seems to be where we are, and somewhere along the way we also lost the ability even to have civility in conversations where disagreement is present.

A disagreement can get ugly quickly. The result, for many, is passivity—just don't say anything. “Live and let live.” But silence about a lot of things has led to a lot of things—not good things.

Will you judge me if I say that sometimes we need to make judgments about people and things? Will you judge me if I say I don't think Jesus said or meant that we have to be perfect before commenting about something or even seeking to correct another person?

We place a great deal of emphasis on the Greatest Commands. Rightly so!

Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

—Matthew 22:37-40 NLT

Jesus is pulling from Deuteronomy 6—*The Shema*—for the first command and from Leviticus 19 for the second. The second command—*Love your neighbor as yourself*—is rooted in God's nature and is the basis for the kind of community God wants us to have. Loving your neighbor involves a form of judgment—an assessment that leads to action! Listen to what God says in Leviticus 19¹, where that 2nd Command comes from:

Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people. Do not stand idly by when your neighbor's life is threatened. I am the Lord. Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives. Confront people directly so you will not be held guilty for their sin. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

—Leviticus 19:16-18 NLT

Loving your neighbor is rooted in the Lord's identity. *I am the Lord*, he says twice. “As my people—an extension of who I am (which is what we are)—don't gossip, don't slander, don't nurse hatred in your heart, don't seek revenge, and don't bear a grudge.”

¹Leviticus 19 is a part of the Holiness Code, found in chapters 17-26. God wants His Community to reflect His nature. He states it clearly in 19:2 — “*Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’*”

I love that expression “Don’t nurse hatred in your heart.” Doesn’t hatred start with anger? Don’t let it live your heart; don’t feed it, don’t nurture it. Instead, don’t stand idly by; be active and proactive. There are times when we need to lovingly confront another, especially if they are in danger spiritually and if it’s going to leave us bitter. We need to talk it out.

So, I’m just saying there is a place for judgment in the community of Christ, in the church. Jesus says this, perhaps a little out of our context but not far:

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

—John 7:24 ESV

In fact, even in our favorite *Don’t Judge* passage, in Matthew 7, Jesus says we can and, at times, should make right judgments. There is an order and a prerequisite:

First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

—Matthew 7:5 NLT

There is a place for judgment, a place for disagreement, for dissent, for criticism. Scripture is clear about all of that in multiple places. That’s not the main point of this sermon, however. The main point, and it’s very much related, is:

I have nothing to prove but I have an example to set.

In a culture that is hypersensitive to judgment, which quickly escalates into anger, provocation, and more judgment and then more anger, I need to remember some things. As a follower of Christ, **I need to remember:**

MY RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD

In John 17, Jesus prayed that we would be in the world but not of the world. This means while we live here, we don’t live and behave like the rest of the world. We have been set apart to be different—to be the loving presence of God in this world.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5, addresses an immoral situation in the church, and he talks about how to deal with it. He says, “You need to deal it; you must deal with it.” But in that context, he draws a clear line between those who have been set apart to be the church and those who are still in the world. He makes it abundantly clear—it’s not our role to judge the world.

It isn’t my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. God will judge those on the outside. . .

—1 Corinthians 5:12,13a NLT

The world will not be won by our judgement, by sarcastic, condescending memes on social media. It will not be won by a posture of superiority or arrogance. The world will not be won by anger, hatred, and provocation.

I’ve been guilty in the past of being more concerned about winning an argument—signaling my virtue and superiority—than I have been concerned about winning someone to Christ. I’m sorry.

I need to go into cultural conflicts with an attitude that I don’t have anything to prove but I have an example to set. Isn’t that the posture and attitude of Jesus? I don’t think he ever criticizes the pagan culture around him. He didn’t condemn the woman; he asked her to change. Now, the religious folks, especially the leaders—that’s a different story. That leads to the second thing **I need to remember.**

MY RELATIONSHIP TO FELLOW BELIEVERS

Because of the cultural climate and influence, we have to be exceedingly careful with this, but we need to be able to speak honestly the truth to one another with love (Ephesians 4:15).

There is an acceptable form of judgment. It comes from a position of humility with an awareness that we have blind spots, and we have our own faults and flaws. Motivation is the key. Is my judgment intended to harm and demean—is it rock-throwing—or is speck removal, meant to help, to improve, to encourage?

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.

—Galatians 6:1 NLT

We have the responsibility to help each other, and sometimes that means we need say something to another person. Our words of critical correction must be preceded by a relationship where love is present and trust is built. That usually comes from being honest about our own flaws, sins, and shortcomings.

Years ago, I think I saved a marriage by speaking up. I was seeing a young married man in our church becoming way too friendly—flirtatious—with a young married woman who was not in our church. Someone else saw the same thing and spoke to me about it. So, I carefully, gently, and humbly went to him. I told him what I was seeing, told him I was deeply concerned about where it would lead. He denied it but then cried. He was angry with me and accused me of judging. But he also stopped the troubling behavior. It was not pleasant but it was the right thing to do. It's difficult, for me, to give correction, and it's difficult to receive it.

If I am on the receiving end of judgment, then I have some responsibility also. I've been the receiving end a lot of over the years—it comes with the territory of church leadership. Sometimes people just like to throw rocks. That's difficult to say the least, but I heard something years ago that helped me: you should always listen for the voice of God in criticism. I think that's true even if it comes from a rock thrower. Maybe there *is* something to their criticism; maybe thought. I've also learned to recognize that people who are hurting tend to hurt other people. It's often more about them and less about you.

I'm aware, also, that people have pointed out things about me—as painful as it is—that are true and needed change. I've learned to process judgment and criticism from others with care and prayer, and it's usually helpful to process it with a trusted friend who will be honest with you. All of it comes down to understanding intention, motivation, and attitude—whether giving or receiving judgment.

WHO I AM

The third thing—the most important thing—is to remember is who I am. I am a child of God—a beloved son of God. If I remember this, then my identity is not based on my performance or your perception of me. I really don't have anything to prove to anyone because God, through Jesus, has made me his son.

Why do I need to win an argument? Why do I need to push others down in an effort to raise myself up? I don't! Nothing—no thing—can separate from the love of Christ. I have nothing to prove, but I have an example to set. I can show you I am loved by exhibiting peace, joy, and a humble confidence. I don't need to get angry, stay angry, provoke you, or promote me. I am who I am by the grace of God.

CONCLUSION

Recently, I spoke at our Bloomington campus. Part of my sermon was about our identity from Colossians 3. Paul says in Christ, there is no Jew/Gentile, Slave/Free, etc. to which I added, “there is no Republican or Democrat.” After I said it in the 11 o’clock service, which was the third time, I chuckled and said, “Wouldn’t that be nice.” What I meant was—wouldn’t it be nice if we could all find our true identity in Christ and be united in Him and be way less concerned about politics that divide so many and will burn up with this world.

After the sermon, a woman approached me very quickly and was clearly upset. She told me she was angry with me about something I said. I was clueless as to what it could have been. She told me she was angry with me for making fun of Democrats. Again, I was confused. She said, “You laughed about Democrats saying you wish they would go away.” I quickly and gently corrected her. She accepted that, understood, and quickly apologized. She then explained that she is a Democrat and had always felt like she was an outsider in churches and not truly welcome. I assured her that she was welcome and that our church leadership had King Jesus and His Kingdom as the highest priority—far above partisan politics.

To her credit, she came to me because she had judged me to be inappropriate. She said she almost didn’t come. I praised her for confronting me because the confusion was quickly cleared up. We had a great talk. It all ended well. That’s the way it’s supposed to work.

We all make judgments all the time about all kinds of things. Be careful. I’m so prone to misjudge, but I want to live in this important reality:

I have nothing to prove but I have an example to set.

Is there any better reminder about all of this than communion? It reminds me of who I am—a beloved son of God. I want to live out that reality with humility. I’m a sinner—deeply flawed—saved by grace, saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. The bread and the juice are reminders of his body and his blood. Consider what John says as we take the bread and the cup.

COMMUNION

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

—1 John 1:8 - 2:2 NLT

Prayer.