

Introduction

A boy named Tommy was picking on some of his classmates at recess by making ugly faces at them. When his teacher, Mrs. Hale, noticed he was, she quickly pulled him aside, explained how mean it was, and told him to stop. She then climaxed her scolding of him with an experience of hers: **“When I was a little girl, my teacher told me that if I made ugly faces, my face would freeze and stay that way.”** To which Tommy replied: **“Well, Mrs. Hale, you can’t say you weren’t warned.”**

There’s a whole lot of judging going on in that little anecdote and that’s why I shared it. It illustrates how commonplace judging others is in normal human interactions. All of us do it.

But should we? To judge or not to judge? That’s the question, which Jesus answers in our text.

Do Not Judge

I once advised a Christian not to follow and give money to a televangelist because of the way he lives. He’s a materialist I said. To which the Christian replied, **“Jesus said we shouldn’t judge.”** During my years of ministry, I’ve heard Christians quote those words of Jesus probably more than any others. It’s safe to say that many if not most ascribe to that point of view. We shouldn’t judge others. One Christian blogger expressed it this way: **“We can judge others and we can love others. But we can’t do both at the same time.”**

To judge or not to judge? Most Christians answer, **“Not to judge.”**

Do Judge Rightly

But Jesus disagrees, using a humorous metaphor in verses 3, 4, and 5. He speaks of a **“speck”** in someone’s eye. A speck is something foolish or sinful that a person is or does. A mother routinely makes threats against her children that she doesn’t carry out. She’ll take away the X-box, she yells, but doesn’t. She doesn’t discipline her children in

other words, which is foolish. It's a speck in her eye.

Notice what Jesus says about that in verse 5 that a lot of Christians miss, **"You will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."** To take a speck out of his eye means that we determine he has one and act to remove it. We judge him in other words. Jesus clearly implies here that judging others is a legitimate part of human life.

Good sense confirms it. If no one ever judged others, there'd be no real human community. You and I live in a fallen world. Imagine a community of people in that kind of world where no one is ever judged and held accountable for what he is or does. No teacher grades a student's performance. No parent punishes or rewards a child's behavior. No consumer assesses a store's prices or goods. No patient appraises a physician's competence. No congregation evaluates a pastor's sermons and so on. You get the idea. True community cannot exist where there is no judging people and holding them accountable.

Let's go back to the mother who doesn't discipline her children. Her mother-in-law saw that speck in her eye and thought about trying to remove it. She considered confronting her – judging her in other words. So she asked me, **"Is it wrong if I do?"** I answered, **"No, it isn't."** I quickly added though that it might be unwise, depending on several factors. But it clearly isn't wrong.

Jesus' words in verse 5 and good sense teach us the truth. There are times when we should judge others, and be judged by them.

But we should judge rightly when we do, which is the thrust of our text. Jesus isn't telling us not to judge. He's telling us not to judge wrongly, and thus, by implication, to judge rightly. Judging rightly involves three elements, each of which I'm going to identify and explain.

The Manner of Judging

The first element is the manner of our judging.

Jesus discusses that in verses 3-5. He speaks of the **"log"** in the eye of the person judging in contrast to the **"speck"** in the eye of the

person being judged. He's being funny here and I'm sure His audience laughed. But His point is a vital one. Almost everyone who judges others has a sin in his life that needs removed.

Most Christians misunderstand what that sin is. They interpret it to be something that's unrelated to the act of judging. It's the idea that no one is perfect and thus no one has the right to judge. Those who judge have sin in their lives, which disqualifies them from judging. So an adulterous attorney I knew reproved an opposing attorney in a case for perpetuating fraud on the court. That attorney must judge and deal with his sin, adultery, before judging and dealing with the opposing attorney's sin, fraud. Most Christians think that's what Jesus is saying.

But He isn't. He's giving us a deep insight into judging itself instead. The **"log"** isn't some sin unrelated to the act of judging. It's the very act of judging itself, and here's why. It's because anger and pride (self-righteousness) are almost always a part of the judging we do. Observe anger, for instance. You'll see that it almost always ends in judging. But even anger isn't as closely associated with judging as pride is. There's almost always an air of superiority about it. **"How could he do that,"** we think, **"I certainly never would."** Let's face it. Anger and pride are almost always a part of the judging we do.

And that is the **"log"** to which Jesus refers. Unrelated sins don't necessarily disqualify us from judging. The adulterous attorney, for instance, was right in judging the dishonest attorney. It would have been wrong of him not to. My point is that the **"log"** isn't some unrelated sin. It's the anger and/or pride with which we almost always judge others. Our anger and pride are almost always as bad if not worse than what we're judging in others. Jesus reveals in verse 5 what that makes us when they are. We're **"hypocrites."**

So, we judge in a manner that makes us not hypocrites. It's with **"gentleness"** to quote Paul in Galatians 6:1. This gentleness has two components or parts. First, we're composed not angry. Thoughts not emotions are directing us so that we're calm and controlled. Second,

we're humble not proud. We know that we too are capable of the same foolishness or sin we're judging. We know and recall, "**There, but for the grace of God, go I.**" With those two components in place, we judge with gentleness. Robert Schuller gave some helpful direction here, "**the three F's.**" Be frank, friendly, and firm.

A father I knew years ago hit the roof when his son came home from college one summer with a tattoo. Furious, he tongue lashed him for getting it, claiming he never did anything that "**stupid**" when he was in school. This father had a log in his eye, anger and pride, as he tried to remove the speck from his son's. He should have judged him with gentleness instead. That's the right manner of judging.

The Motive of Judging

Judging rightly involves a second element. It's our motive, by which I mean the reason or purpose that we're judging.

A psychologist tells about a friend of hers who said that she enjoyed judging others and explained why, "**It boosts my self-esteem and makes me feel better about myself.**" That's one reason for judging – ego boosting. It makes us feel good about ourselves.

Another is retaliation. Remember what I said about anger. It almost always ends in judging. That's because it's such a handy way of hurting people. When we're mad at people, we want to hurt them and do by judging them. Angry that her husband failed to notice her new hair color, a wife declared to him what an "**inattentive**" husband he was.

Ego boosting and retaliation are two of various reasons for judging.

But there's only one right reason. It's to "**restore**" to quote Paul again in Galatians 6:1. The Greek word translated "**restore**" connotes repairing something or putting it in good condition. The metaphor Jesus uses in verse 5, "**take the speck out of your brother's eye,**" conveys just that idea. When my sons Moses and Aaron were little boys, I removed specks from their eyes several times. My reason for doing so was to repair their eyes – to put them in good condition.

We should judge others only for that same reason. We want to help them. We want them to stop being or doing what is detrimental to them and to start being or doing what is beneficial to them. We judge them, therefore, in order to achieve that. If we have any other motive, we shouldn't judge them. The only right motive is to restore.

The Methodology of Judging

There's a third element that judging rightly involves. It's methodology – how we do it. The last line in verse 5 tells us how, **“See clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”** That's our methodology and it's a two step process.

First, we **“see”** the speck **“clearly.”** We determine beyond reasonable doubt that a person has a speck in his eye. We do so by observation and assessment. Observation means we hear the person say things or see him do things – or others do and tell us. Assessment means we conclude from what is heard or seen that the person is being or doing something foolish or sinful. Our basis for assessing is beliefs we have. We stack up what is heard or seen against those beliefs.

We can make three mistakes here. Two are in the observation. First, we don't see or hear enough to draw a firm conclusion, but do. Or second, what we hear or see may be open to more than one interpretation and we choose the wrong one. The third mistake is in the assessment. The beliefs upon which we base our conclusion are false ones.

We must be sure not to make any of those mistakes. We need to observe and assess objectively, thoughtfully, and thoroughly. If we don't, we won't see clearly and shouldn't judge.

So, a person saw her pastor going into a movie theatre, which she interpreted to mean he went to movies. Based on a belief she had, going to movies is sinful, she concluded he wasn't the good person she thought he was and chastised him for it. But he wasn't going to a movie – just picking up his neighbor's son. And going to movies isn't itself sinful. She judged wrongly because she interpreted and believed wrongly.

Absent exceptional circumstances, we shouldn't judge a person unless we know beyond reasonable doubt he has a speck in his eye. That's the first step in our methodology – see the speck clearly.

The second is, **“take the speck out.”** We act effectively to restore the person. Doing so usually requires that we confront him with his foolishness or sin. We do four things. First, describe to him specifically what he's being or doing wrong. Second, state precisely what the detrimental consequences of that are. Third, ask particularly for the change he needs to make. And fourth, state precisely what the beneficial consequences of the change will be.

Conclusion

With that, we now know the manner, motive, and methodology of judging rightly. We know how to judge. But should we?

A mother I know confronted her adult son about smoking, judging him rightly. He got mad though and judged her right back in the same terms she judged him. He noted how badly she herself needed coffee and how much of it she drank. And he continued to smoke.

According to Jesus in verses 1 and 2, what happened there usually happens. People hate to be judged. They usually take it be a stinging personal attack against them, a shocking assault upon them. They rarely overflow with gratitude to us for showing them the error of their ways. They usually just judge us right back instead, in the same terms we judged them, and they don't change.

Judging, in other words, usually doesn't work. It usually doesn't bring about the desired change in people – usually doesn't influence them for good. Don't misunderstand. As verse 5 implies, there is a ministry of judgment. But as verses 1 and 2 also imply, it's a limited one. We must, therefore, be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit in carrying it out.

That's a critical insight and I close with it. **“To judge or not to judge?”** That is the question. **“Judge – when the Holy Spirit leads us to.”** That is the answer.