

Reading: Matthew 7:1-5

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³ ‘Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

Preaching notes:

Bible commentator William Barclay tells us “only the faultless have a right to look for faults in others”, it is the idea that some in our fellowship will “look for faults” or consider themselves to be faultless that is so disappointing. In much the same way as we are warned by Jesus that if we sit in judgement of another then we ourselves must be prepared to be judged in the same fashion. The measure you give will be the measure you get (verse 2b) so by using inaccurate, half-baked information or thinking that the motives of someone are known when actually they are not means it will be the same result for you as you gave to the person you judged, the only difference is that they may have been perfectly innocent of anything but the one who has judged in this fashion will suffer the judgement of God.

Luke 6:37 is a parallel verse to Matthew 7:1-5 in which Luke recounts much of what Matthew covers but with the addition of Jesus telling us the parable of a blind man leading another blind man and both falling into a pit. Reading the two versions together can provide additional insight particularly when linked to John 9.

Turning a blind eye to other people’s behaviour is not the outcome that Jesus is expressing with the command “do not judge”. As Christians we are to challenge each other and hold each other to a higher standard than the world. The apostle Paul, when writing to the early churches was often highlighting behaviours that were inconsistent with a life lived in honour of the risen Jesus. Read the first letter to the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians) and there is no doubt that Paul was judging their behaviour as being wrong. But it is important to note that it was to them he was addressing this, it was direct, factual, instructive and loving. He is writing as a parent to a child (see 1 Cor. 4:14) rather than a judge to a defendant, he does not pronounce a verdict but challenges and encourages -that is the difference.

Judging others in the way that Jesus describes could be thought of as a form of self-harm. “If you judge other people you wound your own soul” (John Wesley), not only which you may shipwreck the faith of another believer, on whose account will God then judge the loss of a soul and the loss of what was planned for him/her who you have, by your judgement, have discouraged? It is a warning that must take note of and be constantly on guard against the temptation to slip into judgement.

Paul in the epistle to the Romans writes “who are you to pass judgement on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls (Romans 14:4), reminding us that as Christians we are all servants of Christ and His body, the church (the fellowship) but our

master is God, not our brother or sister. That does not mean that we do not respect the authority of the leadership of the church and their teaching but we remember the priesthood of all believers: “you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Peter 2:5) and that roles in the church are undertaken on behalf of the church.

This is indeed challenging teaching, but when we allow it to shape us and come under its authority, we can live the full life as a follower of Christ that He intended, a fruitful and faithful disciple.

Amen