

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue 46

Judge Not / Things Christians Shouldn't Judge

Matthew 7:1

Maurice Barratt

One of the devil's commonest devices is to cunningly twist the truth so far that it comes to mean the reverse of what it was supposed to mean, and yet to do it so subtly that we aren't aware of what has happened. It sounds an admirable feat, and it is, but it is remarkable how often it happens. For instance, consider the matter of judging. The bible tells us that there are things that we should not judge (as in the scripture we are studying here), but it also clearly tells us that there are many things we should and must judge. It is a sin to judge the things we shouldn't judge, and just as much a sin to not judge the things we should judge. So what is the devil's tactic? He reverses everything, and encourages Christians to judge the things they shouldn't judge and not judge the things they should.

Because of this, I am dividing this study into 2 parts. In this issue we will consider the things we shouldn't judge; next time, we will look at the things we are commanded to judge. Only that way will we get a balance from the whole counsel of scripture, and ensure that we don't confuse the things we should and shouldn't judge.

New Chapter, New Emphasis

We are beginning a new chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, and it brings a new emphasis. To recall briefly: chapter 5 began with Jesus showing us what his character, God's character, is like, and then exposing the fact that we fall hopelessly short of it, because even if we keep up a good moral outward appearance to the point of keeping every letter of the law, our inward, secret life is selfish and deceitful. Chapter 6 shows us that the key to changing our secret inner life is practising another secret life: prayer, fasting and giving in secret, and that the root behind hypocrisy is covetousness. Only when our covetousness is exposed to us, and only when we do the things that will give God the right to change us, will we be ready for the next stage.

In chapter 7 Jesus begins to give us wisdom. There are things in this chapter which are not easy to understand, and will only make sense to someone who wants to go through, or is going through, the often painful process which happens if we hear and obey the words of this sermon. James talks of two wisdoms, one from above, the other from below, and the characteristics of the wisdom from above (James 3.15-17) are remarkably similar to the beatitudes. Chapter 7 reveals many precious nuggets of wisdom, things that we need to know for our walk of discipleship. As we approach the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, we are presented with two choices, like the two wisdoms of James. We have heard the word, now we need to make a choice.

Jesus makes an interesting comparison with Moses. The Sermon on the Mount is the fulfilment of the old law. As Moses received the law in a mountain, so Jesus goes to a mountain to teach the Sermon on the Mount. Moses presented the people at the outset with the 10 commandments; Jesus presents us with the 9 beatitudes at the outset. Moses concluded the law by confronting the people with a choice: “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil ... therefore choose life” (Deuteronomy 30.15,19); and Jesus also offers us the two ways, the two wisdoms, as we approach the conclusion of his message.

Assessment And Sentence

The first things we learn is what we must not judge. Judgement means basically two things: firstly it means assessing, examining and weighing up the evidence, making a discernment. Secondly, judgement means passing sentence. Both are necessary. A jury may judge in the first way, assessing the evidence and reaching a conclusion; but a “guilty” verdict from the jury is not enough — sentence must also be passed by the judge. As an interesting example, the devil himself has already been judged in the first sense — assessed, weighed in the balance and found wanting. Jesus said before he went to the cross, “The prince of this world is judged” (John 16.11). But sentence has not yet been carried out, and will not be until the devil is cast into the lake of fire.

A Divine Law

The reason we are told to not judge others is that there is a divine law in operation, one which always holds true, and has no exceptions. It comes in two parts, reflecting the two-fold nature of judgement. Firstly, “with what judgement you judge, you shall be judged”, which refers to the first aspect of judgement: as you assess, weigh up and reach conclusions, so Jesus will assess you in the same manner. If you’ve judged unfairly, with partiality, without understanding, or without compassion, you can only expect the same from Jesus. Secondly, “with what measure you mete, it will be measured to you again”. This is the passing of sentence and the administration of the judgement. As you “pass sentence” on others, and speak and act accordingly, so Jesus will treat you when he judges you.

What We Must Not Judge

Jesus says “Judge not ...”, so he means firstly, “do not assess and weigh up”, secondly, “do not reach any conclusions”, and thirdly, “do not pass sentence”. So what must we not judge? Verse 3 tells us: it is our brother’s motives or heart. We should notice firstly that Jesus says “your brother” — so he is specifically talking about Christians judging each other. It is in our homes and churches, in amongst the family of God, that we need to exercise the utmost caution that we do not judge.

Secondly, we can judge, or assess, the “mote” and the “beam”, the speck or the log in our brother’s eye. The whole point is to be able to remove the speck or the log, to recognise the fault or problem for what it is, and to deal with it. “Judge not” doesn’t mean that we are to turn a blind eye to the

faults, failings, problems and sins of others. But it does mean that we cannot and must not judge their motives and hearts.

Thirdly, there are times when God gives us spiritual discernment, a word of knowledge or prophecy, where he reveals what is in a person's heart. Peter said to Simon, a new believer who had previously been a sorcerer, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God ... I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity". Peter could not have known that from his own discernment, and he would have been quite wrong to say it from his own assessment or feelings. But the Holy Spirit reveals things sometimes; however, those occasions are the exception rather than the rule.

Why Must We Not Judge?

Why must we not judge our brother's motives? Because in doing so we will betray our own motives as wrong. We cannot possibly know the things that go on in another person's heart, that lead them into problems or faults. We do not even know the circumstances, never mind the way in which those circumstances affect a person. Everyone is unique, and every heart must be judged uniquely, which is why we can't do it. We can only judge according to our own unique heart.

In Romans 2.1 Paul makes what may seem to be a sweeping generalisation. He says, "You are inexcusable, whoever you are, if you judge: for in that you judge another person, you condemn yourself; for you do the same things." Paul is saying that we cannot judge another person without being guilty of the very thing for which we are judging him. If we think about it, this makes perfect sense. If I cannot know what goes on in anybody's heart except my own, the only reference by which I can judge someone else's actions is my own heart. If I see a fault in a person and try to assess or judge the cause of that fault, the only possible way I can do it is by asking myself what the cause would be if I were doing it. That tells me everything about me, and nothing about the other person.

Exposing Ourselves

We automatically tend to associate actions with motives, but the only motives we can associate with other people's actions are our own motives; and that's the root of the problem.

For instance, I may see someone who eats a huge amount. I don't know why they eat so much, but I know that if I ate that much it would be because of greed. So I assess: that person is greedy. But for me to attribute to this person a motive called "greed", I must know what greed is in my own experience. That greed must be in my heart somewhere. I identify with it and recognise it only because I've been guilty of it in my own experience. Therefore in naming another person's motive as greed, I actually declare myself, not the other person, guilty of the fault. They may have a hundred reasons that I don't know about: they may not have eaten for days, or they may have a chemical imbalance in their body, or they may be the sort of person who overeats when they're really upset, or they may simply have a bigger appetite than me.

If I had never been greedy in my life, the word "greedy" would be meaningless to me in terms of my own experience, or in terms a motive, because I could never suspect others of doing what I've never

even thought of doing myself, what I don't even have a concept of, because it's never been in my heart. My father always thought the best of people, not because he made an effort to, but because it came naturally to him. He was guileless, some might say naive, but because his own heart was pure and sincere, he would always attribute purity and sincerity of heart to others.

On the other hand, I remember meeting men who were gangsters. It was impossible for those men not to be suspicious of everybody else, because they themselves were underhanded and deceitful. They couldn't hear anyone say something without suspecting that it was a lie, a ploy, a trick. Why? Because they were like that. Their judgement revealed nothing but their own heart.

Another Man's Servant

"Who are you to judge another man's servant?", asks Paul (Romans 14.4). Remember that it is other Christians who we are specifically called to not judge. A Christian is "another man's servant" — Christ's servant. A Christian is responsible to Christ, not to you. We must all appear at the judgement seat of Christ to give an account of everything we have said and everything we have done — not before the judgement seat of other Christians.

Appearances

Appearances can be deceptive; everyone knows that. "Don't judge a book by its cover", we say. But it's more than that, because appearances are not "part of the truth" or even a clue to the truth. They are not the truth at all. We can't know the truth, because the truth is to do with hearts and motives. All we can see is evidence; but evidence and truth are not the same thing.

A man I knew was once taken to court and charged with an offence he had not committed. But the court found him guilty. The judge in the case happened to be an acquaintance of his, and some time later he met him again, and told the judge that he had been telling the truth, he was innocent of the charge. The judge was a good man, but unsympathetic. "Next time you come to court", he replied, "don't bring the truth. Bring evidence". Truth is actually no use at all to a court of law, because the law recognises that truth can't be judged. It's an inner matter of heart. The only thing the law can go on is evidence. Of course, evidence can be fabricated, or it can be hidden. That's why it is said that "the law is an ass".

Joseph was convicted of raping Potiphar's wife on evidence. Potiphar knew that Joseph was a good and reliable man, and if he also knew his wife well, he might have not been willing to take her at her word. But she had evidence — Joseph's garment — so Joseph was convicted on the evidence; but the evidence wasn't the truth.

"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgement", says Jesus (John 7.24). It's "righteous judgement" when God reveals something to us by the Holy Spirit as he did to Peter about Simon the Sorcerer. And it is righteous judgement to judge the things that we are commanded to judge (and we shall look at this in the next issue of Challenge). But righteous judgement can never come by judging other people's motives and hearts from the outward appearance.

Your Brother - A New Creature

We're all familiar with the scripture that says "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5.17). We're perhaps not so familiar with the context of that scripture. Paul is urging Christians to not judge after the flesh (verse 16), and pointing out that we don't even judge Christ after the flesh — just as well, for according to the outward appearance, Jesus appeared to lose his temper, break the law, and speak in a very harsh, critical, unloving manner! So when Paul says that a Christian is a new creation, his point is that we should not judge anyone according to the old creation, or according to their old nature. In context, it is actually others, rather than ourselves, who we should see as "new creatures".

Conclusion

You can judge your brother's sins — it's wrong not to — but don't judge your brother. By all means help a person with a problem or fault. Don't pretend the fault is not there. But don't start attributing motives and reasons from your own heart. You'll be wrong, you'll condemn yourself, and you will be no use to the person with the problem. See clearly, remove the "beam" of judging hearts and motives from your eye, and then you may be able to remove your brother's "mote". Never fear to judge sin and call it by its name, but always fear to judge men and their motives.

Experiences From Life

by Joanna Barratt

Walk A Mile First!

Richard Wurmbrand, Reaching Towards The Heights

"Two friends took a stroll along the shore of a river. One slipped and fell into the water. He began to cry, "Help! Help! I can't swim." His friend answered, "You don't have to shout like that. I don't know how to swim either, but I don't make as much noise about it as you do."

We sometimes judge men harshly for their ill temper, their incivility. We behave otherwise, but can it be that we do not pass through their deep waters?

The Lord called certain men fools (Luke 11:40). A Pharisee had invited Him to dine with him. It is not recorded that the Pharisee had uttered one provocative word; he had only marvelled silently that Jesus did not wash His hands before the meal. We would have wondered, too. Without any apparent provocation, Jesus insults the host and all his friends, calling them "fools". A lawyer who also was a guest at this dinner tried to quiet Jesus. The Lord then turned on him and all his companions saying, "Woe unto you also, ye lawyers" (Luke 11:37-52). Few hosts would tolerate such behaviour today.

We judge harshly our unmannered acquaintances. We might have criticised Jesus, too. Have we passed through His deep sorrow to see the essential message of salvation rejected by His own people because of blind leaders who led them astray? Until you have walked a mile in another's shoes, don't judge him."

I have often considered the story of Job and felt compassion for his poor wife. Job was not the only one to suffer incredible pain in this story. Mrs. Job's grief could even have been more intense at losing her children than that felt by her husband, as she was the mother who had given birth and looked after each one of them. It is a known fact that no love surpasses the love of a mother for her child, and she also lost all her children in one day.

There have been times when nursing my children through sickness and pain that I have been reduced to bitter tears knowing that they were suffering so much and I could do very little indeed to relieve them. She had to watch Job daily as he suffered agonies with those boils and not be able to do anything for him. It's no wonder she wished him dead and out of his misery... "Curse God and die" was what she advised. Let Him strike you dead Job, so that you can find relief for your body. Wouldn't you have done the same?

God heard what she was saying, but he understood her heart and knew it was out of love for her husband that she uttered such words. There is no word of recrimination towards this woman in the whole book of Job, even though Job's comforters came in for some heavy reprimands. In fact, God had so much pity on her that he blessed Job through her and opened her womb so that she gave birth to sons and daughters again, and the girls were the most beautiful in the land.

What about Peter! He also uttered vile, rash words when Jesus had been arrested. He blasphemed and cursed saying that He didn't even know Jesus. His best friend! He'd only just pulled out his sword and cut the High Priests' servants ear off a short time earlier and now he was denying any relationship with Him. What amazes me is that this incident is not brought up again by Jesus when He meets him again. Jesus knew Peter's heart so well, that he seems to totally ignore the fact that this denial ever took place. When I think back over times in my life when family or close friends have spoken about me behind my back, it has been burning in me to let them know how much they have hurt and offended me. But Jesus knew Peter. He was confident that Peter loved Him and made allowances for his compromising tongue. He didn't hold anything against him and was only concerned with making sure Peter knew He understood his fears and why he had acted in such a manner. He repeated the same miracle He had done the first time He had called Peter to follow Him, and entrusted him with a fresh vision for the future.

There are so many accounts in the Bible of people who did apparently evil things which were later on vindicated because we judge according to appearances rather than godly judgement. Rahab the harlot, in the Old Testament, not only hid the spies who were sent in to spy out Jericho by Joshua, but also lied to the soldiers who came looking for them, saying that they had already fled the city. Yet this woman, together with her household, was saved when the city fell, and accepted into the Israelite camp.

Another amazing story from the Bible is the account of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. Er, Judah's firstborn son was given Tamar as a wife, but because of his wickedness God killed him before he had managed to produce any children. Onan, Judah's next son was then given Tamar and told to raise

up seed to his brother (as was the custom at that time), but he refused by going in unto her and spilling his seed on the ground, an act which brought the wrath of God and provoked Him to kill Onan also. Judah still had another son and by rights Tamar should have been passed on to him, but this son was not yet old enough to become a husband so Tamar was told to go back to her father's house and wait for him to grow up. But in his heart he was determined not to allow his son to marry Tamar in case something befell him also and the Lord killed him.

During all this time whilst Tamar was waiting for Shelah, Judah's youngest son to become a man, she remained faithful as a widow, but it became obvious that Judah had deceived her and was not going to fulfil his promise. Tamar waited for an opportunity and when it presented itself she took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil and sat in the open place where Judah would be sheepshearing. He had lost his wife recently and, mistaking her for a harlot, promised to pay her well for her favours. Tamar accepted his proposal, but as he couldn't pay what he had promised there and then she allowed him to leave some of his personal belongings with her as a pledge. The Lord opened Tamar's womb and she conceived, leaving the area before Judah could redeem his pledge.

It took 3 months for people to realise that Tamar was pregnant. She had spoken to nobody about the incident and, automatically assuming that she had been playing the whore, the people were bent on burning her for her obvious sin. Tamar requested that Judah, her father in law, be brought and she told him that the father was the owner of the personal belongings she had in her possession. Judah, of course acknowledged them, but said a remarkable thing... "She has been more righteous than I, because I gave her not Shelah my son."

Even their severely strict laws and customs declared that Tamar had not sinned, and indeed pronounced her to be righteous. How easy it is to judge by appearances. God had already killed her 2 former husbands for their wickedness and now he was vindicating her for something which everyone, at a glance, would probably see as being more wicked than their sins. But God looks at hearts and motives, He does not judge in the same way that we do.

King David made a terrible mistake when he took liberties with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. He probably thought that he had made things right by marrying her after her husband had died on the battle field. The fact that God did not visit him immediately must have made him feel comfortable about what he had done, but God just waited, and waited, and waited. After Bathsheba had borne David 3 children, God could put up with his blindness no longer and sent Nathan the prophet to make him aware of his terrible sin. David begged forgiveness but God killed his first child who was conceived whilst Bathsheba was still Uriah's wife, nevertheless God showed that He had been merciful and had forgiven him by blessing Bathsheba with another child (the 4th to David) whom they named Solomon (Chron. 3:5), and God loved this child (2 Sam. 12:24).

When I look back over my life and see the things I've done I'm amazed that God has not struck me with a bolt of lightning. Yet the more I look at my life and analyse what has gone on I realise that God knew the reasoning in my heart behind all my actions. People criticise and condemn at the drop of a hat. It is of no concern to them who they liable and slander, they enjoy their gossip - even in the church! But God knows individuals and although He sees them fall into sin, He gives them much time to repent and turn from their wickedness. If His longsuffering pays off where we see our folly and turn from our wicked ways, He is always ready and willing to forgive and reinstate. But if we

become hardened to the fact that we have done wrong and justify our actions, He has to chasten and eventually judge us. If God gives people “space to repent” without passing judgement immediately, who are we to jump to conclusions and presume? Guard your heart!