

JUDGE NOT

From time to time you have heard me talk about Dr. Bill Hinson. Bill was the senior pastor at First Methodist Church in Houston for 18 years.

I had the privilege of working for him the last three years of his ministry.

Bill was
a great man,
a visionary leader, and
an inspiring preacher.

One of his best-known sermons was titled:
America's Favorite Bible Verse.

You might wonder which verse he believed was America's favorite.

John 3.16?
For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son ...
Nope.

Psalms 23.1?
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
Uh-uh.

Matthew 28.20?
Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.
No, not that one either.

Bill believed that of all the words Jesus spoke,
Americans most resonated with

Matthew 7.1: Judge not or you, too, will be judged.

He said if people knew very little about Jesus,
 the one thing they knew or thought they knew,
 is that Jesus never judged anyone
 and he taught that **no** one should ever judge anyone.
 And people liked that.

They want a God who does not judge
 and they wanted a church that does not condemn.

They know that Jesus said we should love everyone,
 and they think that means
 we should never say that what others are doing is wrong,
 we should live and let live –
 that's the true spirit of Christ
 and that's how his followers should live.

Jesus did say it.

Matthew 7.1-2: 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.

Do not judge.
 It's a rule.
 In fact, it's a command.

It's repeated in Luke's Gospel, chapter 6.

Luke 6.37: Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

And in Romans 14 Paul makes a similar point.
 The Christians in Rome were divided on whether they should eat meat or not.
 And those who ate and those who didn't were judging each other.

Paul wrote:

Romans 14.3-4: The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall.

Paul's point is:

Your brother is not your servant.
 He is the Lord's servant.
 So only the Lord can judge him.

It sure seems like a rule.
 Judge not.

Let me give you three good reasons not to judge.

WHY WE SHOULD NOT JUDGE OTHERS

1. Our Hearts Often Deceive Us

Matthew 7.3-5: 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? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when there is a plank in your own eye? 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.

Be careful when you judge someone else's actions because
 it's so easy to be oblivious to your own sins
 and to the motives within your heart.

A verse we looked at last week and many times before.

Jeremiah 17.9: The heart is deceitful above all things. Who can understand it?

What that means is that much of the time
 we don't even know
 why we're doing what we're doing or
 what our real motives are.

We can honestly believe we are acting
 to defend a principle or protect our integrity
 and, in reality, we are acting out of self-interest or anger
 or some other motive that is less than pure.

So before we judge someone,
we had better
look at the log in our own eye and
inspect what may be in our own heart,
to make certain we're being motivated by the righteousness of God,
rather than our pride or our woundedness or our need to be right.

When I was here the first time, back in the 80's,
I was told that a woman and her husband were leaving the church.
This really bothered me
because they were leaders in the church
and I really liked them.

I called the husband,
and asked him what's up?
He said, Kelly believes God has told her to leave.
I tried to talk with her
but I can't get her to change her mind.

Two weeks earlier Kelly and Joe had invited their Sunday School class
out to their house to begin a week night Bible study.
When I say "out" to their house – I mean **out** to their house.

It was fifteen miles from The Woodlands,
down a long country road, and
guarded by two Doberman Pinschers
who came rushing at you as you got out of your car,
while Kelly and Joe yelled,
“Don't worry about the dogs; they're very friendly.”
That's what happened when I went out to see them 35 years ago
and I'm still traumatized.

Their class was a young couples class
and everyone in the class had kids,
except Kelly and Joe.
They were older and they had never had children.

A weekly Bible study on a school night without child care
made perfect sense to Kelly,
but evidently not to anyone else, because no one showed up.

Kelly waited and waited
until it became evident that no one was coming and
the only thing to do was put up the cookies she had made,
go to bed and have a good cry.

And pray.

And Kelly told me that when she prayed about it God spoke to her.

And he said to her and I quote:

"God told me to leave the church because he said there's not one spiritual
person in the whole congregation."

Before leaving, she sent religious pamphlets to everyone in the class,
highlighting in yellow all the parts about being uncommitted, lukewarm, and
spiritually dead.

All sent anonymously, of course.

Peggy and I talked with them in their home till midnight one evening.

Dr. Robb drove out,
braved the dogs, and
spoke with them later that week.

Her husband, God bless him, asked the same question
that Dr. Robb and I asked:

Is it just possible that your motive for leaving the church
is your hurt and your anger?

Of course not.

God had spoken to her
and he had told her very clearly that
she was the only one spiritual enough to hear his voice.

Not me, not Dr. Robb, not her husband, not anyone in the class.

Before she left the church,
Kelly hurt a lot of people.
People who ended up feeling guilty,
 people who tried to apologize and make up,
 people who loved her.

All judged by her and
 condemned by her.
All hurt because Kelly could not see that her heart had deceived her.
That's what happens when we look at the speck in someone else's eye
 and judge him or her
 instead of looking at the log in our own eye
 and trying to understand what's going on in us.

Only twice in my ministry
 have I really had a problem with a significant part of a congregation.
And, as you would expect,
 both times I was absolutely right and they were absolutely wrong.
But, I don't judge them for that.

Both times I felt judged and misjudged and,
 honestly, I became angry.

A good friend who was a counselor told me,
 Rob, when people get upset with you,
 it's usually about what's going on in them.
And when you get upset with folks,
 it's usually about what's going on in you.
We can't change them,
 so let's talk about what's going on in you
 so you can get to a better place.

That's not a 100%, never without an exception rule.
Sometimes we get angry because someone is doing something
 really, really wrong.
But that's a good insight.

When you and I get hooked and triggered and really ticked,
 before we judge what's going on in the other person,
 we need to determine what's going on in us –
 is my pride being offended,
 do I feel unappreciated or taken for granted,
 is it looking like I'm not going to get what I want?

And if that's going on in us –
 we better look at that log in our own eye a long time
 before we think about talking to our brother about the speck in his.

A second reason we need to be very slow to judge:

2. We Rarely Know Enough to Judge

You've heard the statement there are always two sides to every story.
 Really, there's at least three.
 Yours, mine and the truth.

One thing I know for sure.
 If you've only heard one side of the story,
 you haven't heard the truth.

And there's no way to make a right judgment about something or someone
 unless you know the truth.

You know what taught me this lesson?

Talking to people about their marital problems.
 One person comes in
 and tells me all about the problem in their marriage:
 how hard he or she has tried and
 how difficult the other one has been.

When I was young,
 my heart would immediately go out to the person in my office, and
 I would side with him or her.

That's when I was young – and stupid.
And now I'm old and still not that bright.

But one thing I have learned
is that if I have only heard one side of a story,
I do not know enough to judge.

Invariably the other spouse would come to see me,
and the story he or she told was so different from the one I had heard,
that everything that had been black and white before,
was now shaded in greys and uncertainties.

And so I just don't do it anymore.
You want to come talk to me about your marriage by yourself,
I'll talk with you about you.

How do you need to change?
What do you need to forgive?
How can you grow closer to God because of your problems?

But I'm not going to tell you what you're doing is right.
I'm not going to tell you that your spouse is doing you wrong.

Because if all I'm hearing is one side of the story,
even if it's your side of the story
and you're a really good person,
I'm not hearing the truth
and I won't make a judgment.

Not because you won't be trying to tell me the truth,
but because I don't want to be an idiot again.
And if all I know is one side of the story
and I act like I know enough to judge
and tell you what to do,
I'll be an idiot again.

When all you know is how things seem to you,
and I'm not talking about husbands and wives anymore, but in general –
if you know how something looks to you
and what it appears that someone has done
and you can figure out why he must have done what he did—
but you haven't talked to him –
chances are you don't know enough of the truth to judge him or what you
think he did.

Mark Mitchell wrote an article about being moved by the writings
of three well-known Christian authors,
one being the late Eugene Peterson.
Mitchell sent each one a letter of appreciation.

Within a few weeks he received gracious letters from the other two,
but nothing from Peterson.
Months passed; nothing.

Mitchell concluded that Peterson,
who had written so eloquently about caring for individuals,
was just too busy (or too self-important) to practice what he preached.
A year later, Mitchell was speaking to a small group of people,
and he mentioned the three letters,
including how Peterson had not responded.

It just so happened that one of the women who heard him
was a good friend of Eugene Peterson.
She told Mitchell she'd ask him about my letter the next time she saw him.

A few weeks later, a hand-written letter arrived from Peterson.
He explained he'd received the letter,
but had lost the envelope with the return address.
He had kept the letter on his desk for the entire year,
praying that somehow he'd discover where to send his response.

A few weeks later, when they met for lunch,
Mitchell apologized and Peterson was gracious.

And Mitchell concluded his article by saying,
 Sometimes we presume to know why people don't meet our expectations,
 but so often we don't know the whole story.

Matthew 7.1-2: 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.

Judge people the way you want to be judged.

I don't want to be judged until
 someone knows my motives –
 not just what I did but also why I thought it was the right thing to do.

I don't want to be judged until
 someone knows how much I struggled to reach the decision I came up with.
 I don't want to be judged until
 someone knows how much I prayed and asked God for guidance.

Only when someone knows all of that, do I want to be judged.

And even then,
 I hope they'll be gracious.

Listen, good people can disagree on important issues.
 I have friends on Facebook who are conservative and friends who are progressive.
 And many are respectful and civil.
 But many are not.

On both sides, they'll write about the other:
 These people have lost their souls.
 I don't know how they can call themselves Christians and believe these things.
 This is pure evil.

And, this is not meant to be a cheap shot,
 but those who claim to be the champions of
 tolerance and diversity and open-mindedness
 and always wanting to broaden the conversation
 so that everyone is at the table,
 they are every bit as judgmental as those they disagree with.

Don't be that person.
 Disagree on the issues.
 Express your views with clarity and passion.
 Critique the thoughts of others.

But do not judge someone's heart
 just because they hold a different view than yours.

There are times when we will need to say that
 what someone has done is wrong.

But judge another person –
 his or her heart,
 his or her motives –
 please be very careful and very slow to do that,
 and even then be very gracious,
 because we rarely know enough to judge.

Last reason we are not to judge.

3. There's Often Brokenness beneath the Bad Behavior

There is good and bad.
 There is right and wrong.

The Christian faith takes those realities very seriously.

But the Christian faith also teaches that people are complex.
 And often the wrong we do
 comes out of our brokenness and our fear.

That doesn't make wrong right –
 or even excusable.
 But it does mean that we need to be careful how we judge others.

An interesting study is to read through the four Gospels
 and observe how Jesus refers to the people he came to save.

Well, that's easy, right, Jesus came to save sinners.
That is right, but here's what's strange.

If you count the number of times Jesus calls someone a sinner —
4 Gospels,
89 chapters,
82,000 words —
how many times does Jesus refer to the people he came to save as sinners?
Would you believe less than 8?
What were his favorite terms for people needing salvation?

The lost.
The sick.
Sheep without a shepherd.
The blind.
Those who thirst.
Those who labor and are heavy laden.

Was Jesus soft on sin?
Is that why he wasn't always pointing a finger and saying, 'sinner'?
Of course not.
He always called evil evil,
and he taught that every one of us has a sinful nature.

Soft on sin?
Jesus went to the cross and was crucified for our sins.
That's how seriously he took sin —
that's how big a deal he thought our sins are.

But he knew that behind just about every sin there was a need.
A need for healing,
a need for love,
a need for security,
a need for self-worth,
a need for God.

Broken record time, sorry.

Everyone you meet is hurting.

Everyone you meet is struggling.

Everyone you meet is trying to find love and acceptance.

Most of the people you meet

are trying to figure out why they have everything the world says they need
and still they feel empty inside.

And so much of what you see people doing,

so much of the stuff that gets you angry,

so much of the stuff that is wrong and sinful,

it's because they're hurting.

and they're trying to make the pain of being lost and empty and unsatisfied
go away – even if it's for just a minute.

That doesn't make sin acceptable

and it doesn't provide an excuse.

But in his wisdom and compassion

Jesus could look through the sin and

see the need that created the wrong behavior.

And most often he chose to relate to that deeper need –

the insecurity and the fear that led to the wrong behavior.

And when you do that,

you're much slower to judge and much quicker to love.

And guess what.

People, even "bad" people,

are much more likely to change

not when they're being judged and told how bad they are,

but when they're loved and told how good they can be.

Author Stephen Covey wrote about sitting quietly on a New York subway
on a Sunday morning.

People around him were reading the newspaper,
resting with their eyes closed, or
absent-mindedly gazing out the window.
It was a calm, peaceful scene.

The train stopped
and a man and his children stepped on.
And everything changed.

The kids were loud and rambunctious
but the father sat down next to Covey, closed his eyes,
and seemed oblivious to the scene his children were creating.

Finally, Covey turned to the man
with what he thought was remarkable patience and restraint.
“Sir, your children are disturbing a lot of people.
I wonder if you couldn't control them a little more.”

The man lifted his gaze as if he were coming out of a fog.
"Oh, you're right," he said.
"I guess I should.
We just left the hospital.
Their mother died barely an hour ago.
I don't know what to think —
I guess they don't know how to handle it either."

Instantly, Covey saw things differently.
Irritation and criticism were replaced with empathy and compassion.

"I'm so very sorry," he said.
"Please tell me what happened.
How can I help?"

Why the change?
Because he saw the brokenness beneath the behavior.

Being judgmental is just too easy.
It doesn't require listening or understanding or empathy or compassion.

So, should we ever judge?

When Jesus tells us to “judge not,”
he is talking about condemning another person.
Writing that person off as worthless and unredeemable.

And that we do not do.

But there are times when we should judge.
I had a decision to make here, guys.
Either to turn this one into another two-parter,
like we did with “Always have Faith,”
or be a little shorter on when to break this rule of never judging.

I decided to do the latter,
so there's not as much detail on what we may judge as I'd like,
but I hope this will be helpful and give you something to think about.

What We May Judge

1. We May Judge Wrong Beliefs

In the very same passage where Jesus tells us not to judge,
he says

Matthew 7:15-16: Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing,
but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.

Jesus tells us that there are false teachers.
They look fine and they sound good,
but what they teach is false and destructive.
And he tells us that we are supposed to recognize false teaching
and those who propagate it.

Sometimes it's people in the church
who proclaim in the name of Jesus
truths that are contrary to what God has revealed in the Scriptures.
Sometimes it's cultural prophets
who tell people how to live an abundant life built upon greed and ego.
Sometimes it's teachers who have drunk our culture's postmodern Kool-Aid
and tell young minds that every belief is equally valid,
that the only thing that matters is that you are sincere in your belief
and the truth you live by is your truth.

Or someone who in the name of open-mindedness
will tell you that all religions teach the same thing.
They may not only say this,
but believe it.
And all religions may teach us to be honest, kind to others and concerned about the
poor.
All of those are good and important things.

But when it comes to
who God is,
who Jesus was,
why did he die on the cross,
how we become right with God,
the religions of the world could not be more different
and no other religion teaches the same truths as Christians.

I'm not condemning people of other religions when I say that,
I'm just stating the fact that religions promote different beliefs
that contradict each other.
And it's not judgmental to acknowledge that
or to say that what Jesus revealed about
the Father,
himself,
our need for a Savior and
what he accomplished for us through his life, death and resurrection
is true and that other beliefs are false.

Friends, judging others is not the same thing as judging their ideas
or their beliefs.

We should always be civil
and discuss our differences in the context of a respectful relationship.
But that doesn't mean we should be afraid to think to ourselves
that view just doesn't make sense or
that belief is contrary to what God has revealed to be his will.

And we should not in the name of being nonjudgmental,
be afraid to challenge people to think about their beliefs
or to share ours with them.

If I believe a lie –
a lie that will harm me in this world or
a lie that may keep me from eternity with God in the world to come,
are you loving me
by saying,
“Well, if Rob believes it's true and if it brings him comfort,
who am I to try to get him to see the truth?”

Matthew 10.16: Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as
snakes and harmless as doves.

Be shrewd – that word in Greek means wise, discerning.
Its opposite is foolish.

Our spirits – we are to be innocent and harmless.
Our minds – we are to be shrewd and discerning.
And that means recognizing truth from error.

Look, it matters what we believe
because we are not saved by sincerity.
We are saved by Jesus –
by the truth of what he did for us
and by our faith in that truth.

So, not only is it permissible to judge false truth claims,
 it is necessary.
 And it is important,
 with a spirit of humility and innocence,
 to show people where their beliefs are contrary to the truth.

Second,

2. We May Judge Wrong Values

Jesus judged hypocrisy, materialism, pride, lust –
 the way that people lived and the values they lived by,
 Jesus had no trouble condemning those things.

We all think our values are correct.
 We all think our values are God's values.

You've heard me say before
 "In the beginning God made man in his image
 and ever since we've tried to return the favor."

I'm going to show you a clip from the movie 24 Hour Party People
 that illustrates this perfectly.

This movie is about something you don't care a bit about –
 Factory Records and the music scene in Manchester from 1976 to 1992
 and Tony Wilson who managed and promoted
 some of the most successful bands of that era.

Here he is when it's all come to an end
 and he's trying to figure out what it all meant.

God appears to him and guess who God looks like?

You may have a little trouble understanding everything
 because of their British accents,
 but what's most important is what's said at the end.

Clip 24 Hour Party People

God shows up – in Tony’s image
and does what we all want God to do –
what all suspect God would do if he spoke to us.

He tells Tony what he wants to hear.
Your beliefs are right.
Your values are right.
You’re doing just fine.
I’m just like you.

The god we create,
we create in our own image.
And we have to be very careful about that.

And one thing we need to do is discern what values belong to the Kingdom of God
and judge those that aren’t.
Whether they are values we hold
or values that our culture holds.

Why judge wrong values?

Two reasons.

One, they are contrary to how God tells us to live.

We exist to glorify God.
Everyone exists to glorify God.

When we live according to his ways,
we honor him.
When we rebel against his ways,
we dishonor him.

And because God deserves praise and
we want to see him honored and glorified by every life,
it’s permissible to speak out and judge the values
that cause people to live contrary to what God desires.

Two, the values of the world destroy lives.

What the world promises will create freedom and joy for human beings
does just the opposite.

Materialism, hedonism, pride, getting our way –
those values don't create a life that is free,
they produce a life that is enslaved and alone;
they create a cage where people are trapped and imprisoned.

When we judge wrong values,
we don't do it because we want to condemn people,
but because we want to help people step into the better, more abundant life
that God has for them in Christ.

3. We May Judge Wrong Actions

Jesus said

Matthew 18.15-17: If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just
between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if
he will not listen, take one or two others along ... If he refuses to listen to them, tell it
to the church ...

Jesus says that when someone does us wrong,
we shouldn't ignore it or
say, who am I to judge.

We should go to the person and
quote: show him his fault.

Now the goal, look at it – is to win your brother over.
It's to restore your relationship
and to bring about reconciliation.

Being judgmental – that's going to your brother
to rip into him,
tear him apart, and
make him feel terrible about himself.

That's never our goal.
 But we can judge that what someone did –
 to us or to another person –
 was wrong.

Here's a similar verse in Galatians.

Galatians 6.1: 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.

Again, this verse is so helpful.

We can and should be willing to recognize when someone's actions are wrong,
 even sinful.

How do we go to him – gently and humbly.
 And what's the goal?

 To help the person get back on the right path.

See, it's not judgmental to critique or even condemn
 a wrong belief, a wrong value or a wrong action.

It's judgmental to treat the other person without real concern,
 differently than the way we would want to be treated.

Remember a few weeks ago,

 I gave you a list of people who were very helpful in my life
 because they called me on my stuff –
 sarcasm, arrogance, use of alcohol, lack of patience.

Nobody called me a sinner,

 but they all told me that what I was doing was wrong
 and that I needed to change and get better.

We all need people like that in our lives.

Not people who judge us,

 but people who are willing to call us out
 on our wrong beliefs, wrong values and wrong behaviors.

That's not being judgmental,
 that's being a friend.