

These Forty Days

Matthew 7:1-6

1. Do not judge...

- Matthew 6:14-15

- God will judge us the same way.

- We never know the whole facts.

- It's impossible to be impartial.

- We are not righteous enough.

- John 8:7; Romans 3:10-12

2. ...But use discernment.

*- Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 7:6; 10:16; John 2:23-25; Luke 16:30-31;
Ephesians 6:15*

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Michael O'Neill

These Forty Days, 5th Sunday of Lent *Matthew 7:1-6¹*

Isn't it amazing, when you think about it – how much one little icon has changed people's behaviors. Is there a more ubiquitous symbol than the Facebook's blue "thumbs up"? The "like" button is now used across platforms on multiple social and business network sites, with some using different symbols, like hearts, but they all still accomplish the same thing. The concept started out in development at Facebook as a star and was called the "awesome" button. Then, in brainstorming sessions by the development team, one employee suggested "like" instead, but that received a lukewarm response. Still, the "like" button won and the idea stuck anyway and was finally presented to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

The icon itself seems nearly synonymous with Facebook, even though it originally got the "thumbs down" from Zuckerberg. When it was first presented to him, he thought it would weaken the "comments" and "share" actions. You'd think he felt that way because he was concerned about weakening the social interaction and connection of people, but no – it was because those two features already generated lots of ad revenue for the company, so to weaken those things would mean less money.

Once that problem was resolved, Zuckerberg "liked" the idea. Now, one "like" will make the post show up on friends' feeds, boosting the algorithm to ensure the post is seen and interacted with in order to continue the cycle of engagement.² More engagement = more money.

It went over so well that Facebook then added more emoji buttons, including "love," "laughter," "wow," "angry," "sad," and the newest, "cares."

Thanks to these buttons, you can be angry, excited, or in love with other people's content, but the one thing you *can't* do is disapprove, or give it a thumbs down. One article states, "Championing positivity is all well and good, but Zuckerberg's love of the "like" has more to do with his users' psychology than it does a desire to make the world a happier place.

¹ Sources:

Robert S. Snow, Arseny Ermakov, "Matthew: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition," *New Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City, Beacon Hill Press, 2019), 100-101.

William Barclay, "The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1," *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1975), 146-155.

D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 151.

Roger L. Hahn, *Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 91-92.

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mt 5:23-30.

Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 30-31.

Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 108-110.

² Ozanne, Marie; Cueva Navas, Ana; Mattila, Anna S.; Van Hoof, Hubert B. (2017-04-01). "[An Investigation Into Facebook "Liking" Behavior An Exploratory Study](#)". *Social Media + Society*. 3 (2): 2056305117706785. doi:[10.1177/2056305117706785](#). ISSN 2056-3051.

Negative feedback drives users away, and thumbs-down discourages posting. A "dislike" button could slow the never-ending stream of News Feed content down to a trickle – and that, after all, is Facebook's worst nightmare."³ Less engagement = less money and influence.

Can you imagine how ugly Facebook would become if we could vote a "thumbs down" on people's pictures of themselves, their families, and their thoughts? Our human nature is already prone to judging; as if social media wasn't judgmental enough already.

It is for good reason that Jesus gives us the warning he does in our Scripture passage for today. You already know what it is if you've been going through our Lenten Devotional, "There Forty Days," but either way, I'd like to read the passage for today and I'd like to ask you to honor God's Word by standing as I read it:

"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.

"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 all the time 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.

"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." (Matthew 7:1-6, niv)

There is a stern warning here, along with some really good advice.

So Jesus starts this part of his sermon making it clear...

1. Do not *judge*...

The word translated "judge" had at least two meanings in New Testament Greek. Positively, the word could mean to analyze, evaluate, or decide. Negatively, it could mean to condemn. The negative meaning is what Jesus has in mind in verse one.⁴ Jesus goes from chapter six talking about having a negative attitude when it comes to our own affairs (worry) to talking about having a negative attitude about and toward others (being judgmental). It's important to see that he isn't saying we should never judge, just that we'd better be very, very careful. I'll explain more about that in a little bit.

Jesus points to a bad habit that is all too characteristic of the human race, and teaches his followers and us not to be quick in making negative judgments of others. It is a dangerous thing to do because doing so will bring a similar judgment from God, toward us, in return.⁵

- God will *judge us the same way*

The strongest and first consideration at any time that we want to judge someone else is the

³ <https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/social-media/2015/10/cursed-project-short-history-facebook-button>

⁴ Roger L. Hahn, *Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 107.

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 164.

certain promise that God will judge us with the same severity that we judge others – or, conversely, with the same fairness and grace that we offer to others. That right there ought to be enough to stop us in our tracks any time we think and act judgmentally toward others.

- We never know the whole facts

There is no possible way that we could ever know all the circumstances someone has gone through or is going through. We don't know what their history is, what kind of dysfunction they've endured or what kind of wounds they carry.

There's a story in his book *The Grace Awakening*, that author and pastor Charles Swindoll writes about an experience he once had while ministering at a Bible conference. On the first night he had briefly met a couple who seemed to be friendly and quite glad to be at the meetings. However, as the week went by, Swindoll noticed that roughly ten minutes after he would start speaking at every meeting, the husband would be fast asleep!

That experience began to irritate Swindoll so much that by the time of the final meeting, he was convinced that the man was there only to please his wife, and was "probably a carnal Christian." At the end of the final meeting though, the wife asked to speak to Charles for a few minutes. He figured she wanted to talk to him about her husband's lack of interest in spiritual matters.

But then the wife mentioned that her husband had terminal cancer and that they had attended the conference mainly at his request. It was his "final wish" to be at the conference even though the pain medication he was taking made him drowsy. She then said, "He loves the Lord, and you are his favorite Bible teacher. He wanted to be here to meet you and to hear you, no matter what." Charles Swindoll wrote, "I stood there, all alone, as deeply rebuked as I have ever been." Imagine how greatly embarrassed and ashamed he was. What a dangerous thing it is to judge others.⁶

We can't judge people because we don't want God to treat us the same way, and because we don't know the whole facts. But we also don't even know what's going on in our *own* hearts and minds, because...

- It's impossible to be impartial

We, too, carry some level of dysfunction that likely influences our judgments to varying degrees. We too are products of our environments – we've been shaped positively and negatively by our experiences, so we all have agendas that we are unaware of that taint our perspective of others. So for instance, if we feel insecure in a certain way, we tend to judge others more harshly because of it. Someone might be trying to help, but we will judge them as if they are attacking us.

We all have these agendas and ought to admit it.

Even the Greeks understood this. It's been said that when they were dealing with a particularly difficult or important court case, they would hold the trial in the dark, so that the judge and the jury wouldn't even see the man on trial, so that they would judge as much

⁶ Charles R Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Word Publishing, 1990), pgs. 165-166

as possible by only the facts. Even in our day in jury selection, the judge and attorneys ask a barrage of questions to assure that they can get the *most* impartial jurists as possible. But even they know: there is *no* impartial jurist; they are simply trying to find the *least* partial people that they can.

In circumstances when we are judging someone, it isn't typically because we want to assess the good qualities of the other person. It is usually because that person has struck a sore spot in us or offended us or let us down, right? And in those instances, *which, when we are judging others is almost every time*, you and I cannot be impartial.

Then you add social media to the mix and you've got a potent poisonous plague of judgmentalism.

Just one example: think about the Brett Kavanaugh hearings on whether he should be confirmed to the Supreme Court. One writer, Jason Stadlander, wrote, "Immediately as the hearings were going on, minute by minute public judgments were being made and altered before the entire world stage (on social media). Even the U.S. president was injecting his opinions before the world on Twitter (without filters). [I'm not saying that the accusations against Kavanaugh were accurate *or* fabricated; that's not my point.] What I'm saying is that I don't think it should have been put out there for anyone other than those who can make decisions (about) it – primarily because it was of a sensitive nature (to all parties) and loops in families with children, spouses, etc.

*I think we are too rapidly moving toward a 'public judgment' without trial culture with the use of social media."*⁷ That is a scary (but I believe true) statement.

We don't even hear the news anymore; instead we hear judgmental opinions passed off as reporting. And we are too quick to take the bait, feed our inner agendas, and jump into highly partialized positions of judgment.

Which gives another reason that we should never judge:

- We are not righteous enough

Jesus' famous statement:

"Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7)

...ought to be the last word on this issue of judging others. Paul, too reminds us in Romans:

As it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Romans 3:10-12, esv)

When Jesus made the statement about getting the plank out of our own eye first, it was and is really a funny, hyperbolic image that ought to stop us short of judging. It brings to mind an almost cartoonish picture. But Jesus also did something literarily to make his point even more clear: Jesus structured the phrases of His teaching in verses 3–5 in the form of what's called a "chiasm." In this literary structure, the first phrase corresponds to the last, the

⁷ <https://jasonstadlander.com/social-media-is-building-a-culture-of-public-judgement/>

second to the second to last, and so forth. The center phrase is the point of emphasis or teaching. Here's a kind of diagram that shows the chiasm in verses 3–5:

A - the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye

B - the plank in your own eye

C - first, take out

B' - the plank of your own eye

A' - the speck from your brother's eye

Because the words “first take out” (7:5) are the center of the chiasm, they are Jesus' main teaching point.⁸

So Jesus is *not* saying that we shouldn't help a brother or sister in Christ get the speck out of their eye, it's just that we should first deal with our *own* issues and make sure they are not influencing us in any way.

Verses 2–6 clearly *do* ask us to evaluate and make decisions about other people. Jesus' point is that the person who regularly condemns others will find himself or herself condemned by God. In fact, the passive voice “will be judged” in verses 1–2 should be understood as a divine passive, indicating God as the actor and judge. So God would judge people with the measure of judgment they use has already been implied in 6:14–15, regarding forgiveness – we'll be forgiven by God to the same extent that we forgive others. I'll say it again; if we want God to judge us fairly, we must judge others fairly.

The human tendency is to magnify our own virtues and the other's faults. The repetition of the word “brother” in verses 3–5 suggests Christ is concerned with a condemning spirit in the Christian community. Jesus does not mean that His followers should never analyze the behavior or attitude of others. Rather, *His followers are to first judge their own behavior and attitude.*⁹

Jesus says that, no, we shouldn't judge...

2. ...But use *discernment*

This is really interesting. This passage does not teach that judgments should *never* be made because Jesus *does* speak in verse 5 of removing “the speck from your brother's eye.” Jesus' point is that a person should not be habitually critical or condemnatory of a speck of sawdust in someone else's eye when he has a plank in his own eye. To do that is hypocritical; Jesus doesn't mince words. He says “You hypocrite” in verse 5 (and refers to “hypocrites” in 6:2, 5, 16). Though judgment is sometimes needed, those making the distinctions must first be certain of their own lives. When our own behavior or attitude has been corrected, *then* we are better able to analyze and assist with someone else's issues. In fact, we are also more inclined to show mercy after dealing with the reality of our own faults. John Wesley comments that one should not judge a brother “without full, clear,

⁸ Roger L. Hahn, [Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 108.

⁹ Roger L. Hahn, [Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 107–108.

certain knowledge, without absolute necessity, without tender love.” I like that – knowledge, necessity, and tender love.

So when we are genuinely trying to help someone else, we must be very careful to do what would be appreciated and beneficial. But others don’t always want help. Jesus says something really interesting in verse 6. He says that one should never entrust holy things (what is sacred) to unholy people (dogs) or “throw ... pearls to pigs.” This seems kind of weird and out of place with everything else. But it is there, and for good reason, so we need to unpack it together.¹⁰

Now, the function of verse 6 talking about dogs and pigs in Jesus’ sermon is debated. Some interpreters see it as an independent saying unconnected to either the verses before or after it. But really the best thing is to see verse 6 as a concluding and balancing statement to verses 1–5. Jesus *does* expect his followers to set and enforce moral standards in the community of faith. He *does* expect us to hold each other accountable and to speak the truth in love to each other and correct each other when necessary, but he warns us: there are people in the church who don’t want it.

So what’s the deal with the dogs and pigs? I probably don’t have to tell you that dogs and pigs were despised in those days. Dogs were not pets in the ancient world – they roamed in wild packs like wolves, scavenging scraps of food. They were considered to be fearless and vicious. As a result, one would never give them what is sacred. Dogs would tear you to pieces. A person must understand the danger of dogs. In the same way, the pigs were not like the domesticated farm pigs that usually come to our minds; this was not like Wilbur – “some pig” from Charlotte’s Web. Pigs were wild, vicious and dangerous. Even a single pig could trample a person under its feet. Pigs would destroy precious pearls.

Here’s the point: *the follower of Jesus must be wise enough to discern the people who are dangerous to the community and to make sure the love and grace of the community is not destroyed by such persons.*¹¹

To make this point a little more clear, let me share with you one interesting theory from some scholars. To understand this theory, it we have to look at verse six again. Keep in mind, this is only a theory and isn’t accepted as fact; but it is interesting. Again, here’s that verse:

“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”
(Matthew 7:6, niv)

So for sure, Jesus is using another literary technique here, called “parallelism,” where he says the same thing in two different ways in order to emphasize his point. But according to this theory, see that word, “sacred,” and that word “pearls”? Well, the Hebrew word for “sacred” is *kadosh*, and the Hebrew language does not have vowels, so it’s spelled “KDSH.” Okay? But in the Aramaic language, which is what Jesus is speaking, the word “ear-ring” is

¹⁰ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “[Matthew](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 33–34.

¹¹ Roger L. Hahn, *Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 108–109.

“kadasha,” and when translated to Hebrew, it too is spelled “KDSH” with no vowels.

Sacred: *kadosh* (K D S H)

Ear ring: *kadasha* (K D S H)

So the theory is that it is possible that an early church scribe got the words confused in the translation, and the original phrase might have said:

“Do not give dogs ear rings; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”

Of course, that’s only speculation, but it does help understand the point that Jesus was trying to make.

Either way, Jesus is saying that there are certain people that we need to be careful around. Inside the church, there are some Christians who don’t want to be encouraged in their faith, don’t want to be corrected, don’t want to be held accountable. So we need to be discerning about people. We don’t want them to attack us for our love and good intentions and toward them. We need to not allow them to treat spiritual things as if they were meaningless trash. Plus, in their anger, they might actually turn on us when we do try to help them.

One thing I’ve found out that happens sometimes when I am doing counseling for someone is that they come with a genuine need, and they want their pain or guilt to go away, so they will come to me, and they will confide in me their issues, their shame, or their sins. And they feel better, for a little bit. But then after a couple of days, some kind of switch in their brain flips, and instead of being relieved that they’ve confessed to someone, they think, “I just made myself vulnerable to Pastor Mike. He now knows my weaknesses, my flaws, and my secrets.” So suddenly I become a threat and an enemy in their minds, and instead of continuing the work of finding healing, they attack and lash out at me and then retreat back into themselves. They try to make things go back to the way they were before, when they were keeping their pain and shame and guilt boxed up inside them. I guess sometimes it’s like needing to lance a wound to get the infection out; that can be a long and painful process, and after their first visit to the surgeon, instead of following through with their treatments, they make the doctor out to be the enemy and they don’t go back again. Meanwhile after a few moments of relief, the poisonous infection inside them comes back with a vengeance. I understand the mechanism in people that causes them to do that, but it sure doesn’t feel good when they do it.

I’ll be honest and tell you that over my 37 years of ministry, some of the worst things that have been done to me have been done by people *in the church*. And I’m not alone. Years ago, one of our General Superintendents in the Church of the Nazarene gave me some very good advice. He was talking about how, dealing with some prickly people in the church can be very difficult and very painful. Some will blame their pastor for everything that they think is wrong in their lives and their church. This general superintendent said, “Mike, in ministry you’ve got to have a tough hide and a tender heart. If you get those reversed, you’ll get eaten alive and you won’t survive.” That is good advice for *every* Christian, and that is part of what Jesus is saying here. Pastor Arden used to tell me, “Mike, if you don’t want to get shot at by some people in church, then don’t lead.” I loved Pastor Arden’s

advice! Dogs and pigs come with the territory, so I've got to be discerning.

So Jesus is warning us to use discernment with people, while at the very same time, never judging them. And he gives us very good reason. One is because we need to

- Guard from sin

This doesn't mean that the people who attack us are unclean sinners and we will be infected by them. But it does mean that we must guard against some of the things that *could* happen as a result of not being discerning. One possible pitfall is that we don't even recognize their attitudes and behaviors as being wrong, and we could get sucked into having the same attitude and behaviors.

Another is that we could get ourselves hurt to the point that we end up being angry, resentful, and unforgiving toward them and the church. That can lead us to judgmental thoughts about the person, to us gossiping or slandering about the person to others. We become bitter and turn against the church over the occasional dog and pig. So whether we get sucked into sin or get so wounded that we sin in our attitudes and actions toward them, discernment will help guard us.

Not only do you need to be discerning in order to guard yourselves against sin, it's also so you can

- Protect yourself and the church

There are people who *claim* to be Christians (I don't know – maybe they are) who, whether consciously or not, will end up bringing division in the church, getting people to choose sides, and getting the church off mission and focusing on manufactured issues. Jesus warned about this in Matthew 10 when he sent his disciples out to preach the good news, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and drive out demons. After giving them some other instructions, he made an interesting statement. He said:

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16, niv)

Shrewdness is not exactly a positive character trait; it's kind of like all the worst character traits of a stereotypical car salesman. But Jesus' point is that there *are* people who will attack and hurt you. They seem clever, sharp-witted, astute, and intelligent. So he is saying that we need to be fully aware that there are people who act that way out of their own woundedness and for their own selfish agendas, but at the very same time, *we* must never be guilty of acting that way. We need to be fully aware of how *they* behave, but never be guilty of behaving that way *ourselves*. We must still treat them with love and fairness; just do so while being wise about them and guarded around them.

There's another reason, and we've already stated this one way or the other, but let me just state the obvious:

- Not everyone can be trusted

The plain and simple fact is that even within the church, there are people that can't be trusted. I like something that Ronald Reagan once said: “Trust, but verify.” I used to have a sign on my desk that said that, to remind me to be careful so that I protect myself and the

church that I am charged with protecting from those who have a history of hurting others. This is what was going on in John 2 when it writes about some of Jesus' followers:

“Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.” (John 2:23-25, niv)

Jesus was careful not to "entrust" Himself to the people in Jerusalem. Jesus knew people's hearts and minds. There have been and are people in the church who are only there for what they can get out of it for themselves, not to submit themselves to Jesus and his mission for their life and the church. So do not judge – ever – but by all means, be discerning.

According to pastor and author John Ortberg, a fictitious manual for Peace Corp volunteers headed for South America offers advice on how to handle a chance encounter with an anaconda (a large type of boa constrictor). This is the list of instructions under the heading "What to Do If Attacked by an Anaconda":

1. If you're attacked by an anaconda, do not run; the snake is faster than you are.
2. Lie flat on the ground.
3. Put your arms tight at your sides and your legs tight against one another.
4. The snake will begin to climb over your body.
5. Do not panic.
6. The snake will begin to swallow you from the feet end.
7. Step 6 will take a long time.
8. After a while, slowly and with as little movement as possible, reach down, take your knife, and very gently slide it into the snake's mouth. Then suddenly sever the snake's head.
9. Be sure your knife is sharp.
10. Be sure you have your knife.¹²

As ridiculous as those instructions sound, they do make sense. In a similar way, what Jesus is telling us is that, for the sake of our own spiritual life and health, as well as the spiritual life and health of our church, we must never judge each other or others, but we do need to have discernment in relationships. We need to be aware that there are some people who are “anacondas,” so we’d better have “the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:15). Let us be aware of them but never be guilty of being that way ourselves or judging them. The best hope for restoring them is to heed Jesus’ wise and loving advice, teaching, and command found in Matthew 7:1-6.

Pray

¹² Source: John Ortberg, "The Daniel Project—Part 3," (November 15, 2009)

Benediction

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)