Judge Not (Title Slide)

Matthew 7:1-6

Good morning. Would you stand with me as we read todays' scripture. Matthew 7:1-6

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way 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.

6 "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.

You may be seated

So if you ask people the most popular scripture they can think of, John 3:16 is usually the first to come to mind. You all know the verse. Well Matthew 7:1 comes in as a close second. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." When Pastor Kerry asked me to teach while he was out of town, I knew immediately that God had been putting on my heart a message about judging for some time, because it is something I have battled personally. As long as I can remember, I have always believed in God and was very religious. I went to a Catholic grade school, went to church every single day, and even came very close to becoming a priest. When I share my testimony, it is not one of hitting rock bottom and turning to Jesus. I followed the rules set out by not only the Bible, but by the Catholic Church. Before I started studying God's Word and gave my life to Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I thought of myself as a role model for being a good Christian. But there was one big problem. I was a Pharisee. I was intolerant. I judged everyone and unintentionally gave the impression that I thought I was better than everyone else. I always wanted to be the one in a situation in which the teacher would scold the whole class and say you were all bad except Rick. In fact, an example of that actually happened in 8th grade, The teacher walked out of the room and all of us started throwing paper airplanes and generally messing around. Unfortunately, the teacher came back unexpectedly and disciplined everyone in the class with an extra assignment. And then said everyone except Rick because I know he wouldn't do something like this. At the time, it was a dream come true. Now I look back at that incident with complete embarrassment. I know now that I was judgemental and self righteous and had little mercy or tolerance for the speck in others eye, not even recognizing the log in my own eye. And it's now an issue that God is continuing to work on in my life.

It was an affirmation of the need to talk about this when we went to my sisters for Christmas and she was wearing this shirt.

Slide 1. Picture of Don't Judge me Santa shirt

We think about being judged often and yet we judge others frequently. Now, although this is one of the most memorable scriptures, it is also one of the most misunderstood and is often taken out of context.

Slide 2. Picture of redacted scripture

I found this graphic as I prepared for the message. When people read this scripture, they often read it as shown in this image. They stop after the words “Judge Not”. It’s very similar to the way that some men read Colossians 3:18-25. They stop after reading, “Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting to the Lord”. And they don’t put that statement in context with the next sentence that says. ‘’Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”

I had a friend who would read the last few pages of a book so he knew the ending in advance. It relieved his anxiety. Then he would read the book from the beginning, taking comfort in knowing how it ends

When we meditate and study the Bible, that’s exactly what we experience. We know the entire story. We read in John 16:33 that Jesus told his disciples. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” As we read the Bible, we **KNOW** the ending! God wins, creates a new heaven and earth and fully establishes His kingdom, and those of us who follow Jesus Christ and accept Him as our Savior spend eternity with God. So we can live our lives with peace and hope, no matter what we face, knowing the end of the story

So today, we are going to unpack this scripture to understand what it means by judging and what it doesn’t mean. But let me ease any anxiety by sharing the ending. There is a difference between judging and spiritual discernment. Discernment is the ability to choose between what is right and what is false and wrong. So the ability to discern is synonymous with the ability to think biblically. As Christians, we are to spread the Gospel and help bring others to Christ as commanded in Matthew 28:19-20, The Great Commission. But Scripture also warns us not to judge others based on our own self righteousness because all of us fall short of the glory of God. So the concluding message today is that Jesus did NOT intend this verse to obliterate our ability to judge between behavior that the Bible encourages and behavior that the Bible forbids. Instead, He wants us to avoid rashly judging others with a hypocritical and unkind spirit since we all sin. **AND** to make sure that we correct our own transgressions so we have the clarity to help others overcome their sins.

I read somewhere that when it comes to judging, there are basically two kinds of people. There are those who will not make **ANY** judgements because they just want to live and let live or they love the word “whatever” or they are fearsome of being labeled as intolerant or inflexible. And there are those who are quick to judge because they have a critical spirit. Which means they judge lots of things, whether they are Biblical behaviors or not. They are looking for ways to pick away at things that don’t agree with their own preferences. But Christians can be a third group in the middle…. Those who do not judge wrongly, but have spiritual discernment and can draw others closer to God.

So let’s start out by talking about **WHY** we shouldn’t judge

Slide 3: First Reason: We are not the Judge

There is only one true judge and that is God. We're not qualified to judge. God is omniscient and knows all things. When we appoint ourselves as judge, juror, and executioner, often we don't know the other person's motives, their heart, or their history. We simply judge what we can see from our limited perspective. And that often results in judging with condemnation rather than with compassion and understanding. Romans 14:4 says **"Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls".** Only God can judge perfectly because He is both just AND merciful. He disciplines us, but He does it out of unconditional love for us. And He has self control and patience, but WILL reveal His wrath against the ungodliness of wickedness of man. These are characteristics that belong only to God, so we are not qualified to act as a righteous judge. Only God can **LOVE** and Judge. Romans 12:19 tells us Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"[a] says the Lord.

And James 4:11-12 says, "Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?" When we judge others, we are sitting in judgement of the law. Because the law tells us to love your neighbor as yourself and when you speak out against your neighbor, you are no longer loving them, but rather judging them. When we set ourselves up as judge, we make ourselves to be better than others. And the problem with that is **ALL** of us sin and fall short of God's glory.

Slide 4: Second Reason: God will judge you the same way you judge others

Matthew 7:2 says, "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you".

If you are harsh and overbearing to others, God will judge you harshly. On the other hand, if you show mercy and grace, God will show the same to you. God has forgiven us an unpayable debt. Now He asks that we forgive the comparatively smaller debts we are owed and extend the mercy and grace that we receive from Him. Jesus taught this principle in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy". And again in the Lord's prayer, when he said "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors"

We also find this same principle in Paul's letter to the Romans. Romans 2:1-3 says "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. **2** Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. **3** So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?"

Scripture makes it clear that we can expect to receive judgement on the same basis as we give it. In the flesh, we have this inherent desire to see "people get what they deserve". But the truth is we certainly don't want what we deserve. Because without God's mercy and grace, none of us are saved. Romans 3:10 tells us that "No One is Righteous, not even one"

We live in a fallen world and ALL of us fall short of God's glory and sin. So if we're not careful, it's really easy to start judging others when we observe behavior that is inappropriate or language that is insensitive or offensive, without recognizing that others see that same behavior and language in us. It's easy to forget that as we appoint ourselves as judge, juror, and executioner, one day the judgements we lay on others will be laid on us by the only true judge…. Our God. And quickly we will become the defendant instead of the prosecutor.

Slide 5: Third reason: We should judge ourselves first

Look at 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? 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"

As I read this scripture, I get this visual image of my telling someone they have spinach in their teeth while I sit there with mustard and ketchup all over my face.

We can often be very good at judging others, but not so good at judging ourselves. Jesus does not tell us that it is wrong to help your brother get the speck out of his eye, but rather before you try to do so, deal with the log in your own eye

The faults and sins of others have a way of taking our eye off the mirror and putting it on others. It can become easy to think that we are the observers of in appropriate behavior and not an offender ourselves. When we spend more time noticing others' sins than our own, we struggle to wear the spirit of gentleness. So why is it so important that we examine the log in our own eye? First of all, no one knows your own sins better than yourself. You know your heart, your thoughts, your motives and your weaknesses. Focusing on someone else's faults allows you to take the focus off our own. Secondly, We start playing the comparison game. How many times do we look at someone else's sin and say well at least I have never done that. Remember the parable Jesus told about the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18**:** 9-14

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

If we're not careful, we can get into the sin comparison game. Well I've made mistakes, but I have **NEVER** done anything as bad as that person has done. Before I became a Christian, I remember thinking things like maybe I lie a little or cheat a little, but I've never killed anyone. And yea, maybe I looked at other women when I was married, but I never had an affair. Sin is sin and we don't get to grade sin and judge which sin is worse than another. **ANY SIN** disqualifies us from earning our way to Heaven. God doesn't grade on a curve.

Slide 6: Fourth reason: If we love our neighbors, we should want to help them overcome sin, not condemn them for it.

Jesus tells us that we can't help others until we help ourselves. He tells us to deal with our own issues and then you can help your neighbor. And He tells us that if we truly love our neighbor, we will want to help him with his sin. Not judge or condemn him, but help him overcome sin in his or her life.

So let's talk about what this scripture says about judging others wrongly.

Slide 7: Judging with a hypocritical or unkind spirit

We should never judge out of jealousy or bitterness or selfish ambition, or to make ourselves look better, but rather to seek to build the person up in Christ. If we judge with a critical, judgmental spirit, we tend to condemn **people**, rather than behaviors. What you are thinking or saying could in fact be true, but if you're sharing it to make yourself look good and slander the other, it's a problem.

It can become a manifestation of pride and the appearance that we think we're better than others.

In the past, I just felt compelled to tell people when they were doing something wrong. But I had the wrong motive. It was done out of condemnation and scolding instead of trying to help them change inappropriate behavior.

Slide 8: Judging without knowing the facts

A number of years back, Jan and I had hired a landscaper to do some work around the house. He was supposed to show up a certain week and didn't. Week after week passed and I didn't hear a word from him. So my intolerance was building and after about 3 weeks, I called him to give him a piece of my mind about being inconsiderate and irresponsible. Imagine my embarrassment when he apologized and told me that his mother had passed away and he was unable to meet his obligations. Judging without knowing the facts.

How often do we allow ourselves to think the worst about someone rather than admitting we don't know what we don't know. Someone once told me, give someone the benefit of the doubt. They may surprise you. Have you ever judged someone on physical appearance without knowing anything about them? James 2:1-4 warns us about judging by appearance "Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. [3] If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by

my feet,” [4] have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

In the past, I know there were times when I may have seen someone poorly dressed or with lots of tattoos or piercings and unfairly made assumptions about their character without knowing anything about them.

Slide 9: Judging according to human standards rather than God’s Word

I told you earlier that I was very judgemental when I grew up. And some of the things that I was judgemental about were not Biblical principles, but man made ones. The Bible does not make smoking or drinking alcohol in itself a sin, but I was very judgemental of people who were engaged in this behavior. I even remember in Catholic school being absolutely furious that some people actually ate meat on a Friday. When I was around 16 years old, I was in the car with my brother and his girlfriend and during a conversation, she said something like “The hell with that”. I went ballistic and told her that she shouldn’t use that kind of language and even dug a deeper hole by telling her that in particular, women shouldn’t talk like that. Before I knew it, my brother was turning around from the front seat, grabbing me by the shirt and throwing me out of the car.

Romans 14 tells us not to quarrel over disputable matters. Paul talks about judging others because of what they eat or don’t eat, or other things that are not Biblical truths. We just went through an interesting election process. People had some **VERY** strong opinions about policies and positions on a number of issues. As I prayed about the outcome, I realized that I had to separate those issues or positions that were tied to Biblical Truth and those that were not. When it came to issues like marriage, sexual identity, and abortion, I realized that I had to take a stand when I considered a candidate. But when it came to things like economic policies or climate policies, I had to be careful to not let my personal convictions become the standards by which I judged others who didn’t share those convictions.

This was one of major sins of the Pharisees. They had a number of man made rules and then judged those who didn’t keep them. They neglected God’s commandments and instead held to the traditions of men and their man made rules. Matthew 23:23 tells us “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”

It's one thing to advise someone not to smoke because of their health or to not eat certain foods that are unhealthy and quite another to judge them as sinners

We should also not judge believers who practice their faith in ways different from us. We could decide that someone is spiritually immature because they don’t’ pray, dress, or practice their faith in the same way as we do. Some people pray quietly and don’t tend to pray aloud in groups. That doesn’t mean they are spiritually immature.

Slide 10: Judging without Grace or Mercy

There is no question that people do in fact exhibit behavior or use language that is not aligned with God's Word. But again, all of us fall short of the glory of God. I love Pastor Kerrry's observation that all of us are just messed up Christians trying to mess up less. And again, this scripture tells us that we will be judged with the same measure that we use. When we mess up, don't we want mercy or grace for our mistakes? Our salvation is because of God's mercy and grace, not because of anything we do. So if we judge without mercy or grace, we will be judged the same way.

So let's switch tracks now and talk about what this scripture telling us not to judge does **NOT** mean. And this goes back to the conclusion I shared earlier. There is a difference between judging and spiritual discernment. While we are not to judge… that is to belittle, punish or condemn, we are to use sound judgement in being discerning when it comes to Biblical Truth and God's Word. As Disciples of Christ, we are commanded to spread the Gospel and bring others to Him. That means that often we have to respectfully rebuke the sinful behaviors of others and point out the path back to the Lord.

So what does spiritual discernment look like

Slide 11: Being Discerning regarding someone's character or Teaching

Matthew 7:6 says "Do not give what is holy to the dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine. " Dogs and swine refer to dangerous people. Jesus isn't talking literally about animals. We would not be able to obey either of these commands unless we were allowed to make moral judgements as to what is right and what is wrong. We have to be able to recognize who we are dealing with. So some think that Matthew 7:1 is saying you can't call sin sin, that you can't comment on moral behavior, and you can't judge someone else's actions as wrong. The problem is that if you can't judge something to be wrong, then you can't judge it to be right either. So clearly Jesus cannot mean that we cannot judge wrong or right in accordance with Biblical principles. John 7:24 says "do not judge by appearances, but judge with RIGHT judgement". And right judgment is all about spiritual discernment. Critical thinking, discernment, and right judgement belong to the mature disciple of Christ.

Matthew 7:15 says "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." How could we possibly look out for false prophets unless we recognize them. Again, it takes character discernment to identify the wolves in sheep's clothing, It requires us to identify when someone's teaching is false.

Unfortunately, we currently live in a culture in which you are accused of being unloving and judgmental if you dare to confront sin or if you expose a false teacher. Someone was once talking to me about same sex marriage, transgenders, and abortion and told me that Christians are supposed to be loving, forgiving, and tolerant. I had to tell that person that I agreed with them. But we are **NOT** supposed to accept behaviors and thoughts that contradict God's Word. The reality is that you are unloving of others if you allow false teachers or wolves to prey on the flock or to allow sinning to infect the flock without exposing them.

Slide 12: Addressing a believer's sinful behavior or false teaching

As we said at the beginning of this message, this scripture is often misunderstood. People will say that they should never confront someone about their sin because they would be judging them. But if our goal is to help them overcome sinful behavior instead of condemning them, it is in fact **loving** to confront them. If you see a brother or sister in Christ sinning or believing in false teachings, Love should motivate you to do everything possible to warn them rather than allow him or her to suffer eternal consequences from not following Jesus. James 5:19-20 says, "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, **20** remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins."

We all sin, but when we see patterns of behavior, we are called as Christians to address it.

Last year, I delivered a message on becoming a reflection of Jesus and imitating the way HE spoke, thought, and acted. We talked about the fact that Jesus had no problem rebuking people for wrong behavior, but He always did it with compassion and love, not condemnation and with a desire to get them to correct that behavior. He always spoke Truth in love, confronting people with a view to change, not to condemn them. When we speak to someone about sin in their lives or about false teaching, our goal should always be to restore the sinning believer, as well as to honor God and protect others from that sin. So it is not being judgmental and is in fact an act of love to confront sin and false teaching in the church.

So whether it's judging or spiritual discernment really depends on our motive and the way we say things. Like Jesus, our motive should be to correct the behavior, not condemn the person. Ephesians 4:29 says "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen".

As I draw this to a close, I want to return to the conclusion I shared at the beginning. Matthew 7:1-6 does not prohibit us from spiritual discernment, but rather judging others with a hypocritical and unkind spirit. And our foundation for spiritual discernment is the Word of God

Timothy 3:16 says that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **17** so that the servant of God[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

So as we consider correcting or rebuking someone, the first thing we should do is pray about it. It's always better to pray and think about what we want to say rather than just react to something in the moment. That's why James 1:19 tells us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. We need to make sure that our motive is right. We also need to make sure we have our facts right and assess the source of our information. Are you addressing the issue from a spirit of condemnation or to help someone else correct inappropriate behavior. The answer to that question determines if you are judging or using spiritual discernment.

Jesus teaches us to approach others with humility, kindness, and self-awareness. He challenges us to avoid hypocrisy, examine ourselves before criticizing others, and apply fair Biblical standards in our judgments, always advocating for compassion and love over condemnation.

Setting yourself up as judge leads to conflict and broken relationships. Obediently seeking to love and build up others leads to harmony and restored relationships. Think about that the next time your tempted to judge someone and ask yourself if you are doing this to make yourself look better or to condemn the person or if you are doing it to help them overcome sinful behavior and draw closer to God

In saying "judge **not** less you be judged", Jesus is reminding us to avoid the damaging cycle of harsh judgement. Instead he invites us to build relationships based on love and understanding, while at the same time, recognizing our own need for growth, and to approach everyone with genuine care and a desire to help them overcome sinful behaviors.

Rather than harshly admonishing people, which only tends to alienate, believers should extend grace and share the Gospel in the hope that those who hear it will become committed followers of Christ

Of course for us to use spiritual discernment, we have to stay in the Word so we know what is true and what is false. What is Biblically right and wrong in all areas of life. A discerning person keeps his reasoning aligned with God's Word so he or she steers clear of false teaching. We need to study Scripture and pray for the Holy Spirit to fill us with discernment.

I know I've shared this with some of you in the past. But there is a comedy team called Penn and Teller who are known atheists. Penn made a statement once that he doesn't understand Christians. He says that if he saw a person standing in the way of a speeding car, he would do everything in his power to move them out of the way so they were not injured or even killed. So if Christians truly believe what we say we believe, why would we not be doing EVERYTHING in our power to share the Gospel and draw people to God so they spend eternity with Him. Think about this the next time you avoid sharing God's truth for fear of being labeled intolerant or judgmental.

Let me pray for us.

Father, thank you for your Word today. We know that you are the one and only righteous Judge. We all sin and fall short of Your glory. So we are not qualified to judge others But you do call us to use spiritual discernment and lead others to you. Help us to understand the difference between judging others with a critical and unkind spirit and helping them to correct behavior that is not aligned with your Word so they can draw closer to you. And give us the courage to address the plank in our own eye before attempting to help our brothers and sisters remove the speck in theirs. And help us to address spiritual discernment with humility, kindness, love, compassion, and self awareness. We pray this in Your Holy and precious name. Amen.