

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark Peters and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance. We're going to continue looking at Jesus' *Sermon On The Mount*, but as a way of entering into His words, I would like to begin by inviting your participation. I've brought a **flip chart** on stage with me and I need your help in order to fill it out.

When you hear the word "*judgmental*," what descriptors come to mind? Proud, arrogant, narrow-minded, critical, disapproving, negative, condemning, controlling, blind to their own faults, hypocrite, etc. Let me stir the pot just a little—could we add the word "Christian" to the list? Or how about "the Church"?

illus: I can't say that I was ever a fan of the t.v. show "*The Simpsons*," but I do remember one scene quite vividly. Homer Simpson is in his front yard, talking with his neighbours, Ned and Maude Flanders. The Flanders are portrayed in the Simpsons as a conservative, fundamentalist, Christian family—always cheerful, always strict, and very odd. In this particular front-yard-conversation, Homer asks the Flanders how they spent their Summer, and Maude responds saying, "*we went to a Christian camp to learn how to be more judgmental.*" Not very subtle is it?

In a book entitled, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity*, the authors reveal the results of surveys conducted among people who don't follow Jesus. When asked what would keep them from following Jesus, or, from going to church, one of the most common responses was that Christians are too judgmental.

I have heard this objection most of my life, and to be honest it frustrates me. Christians are too judgmental? I want to ask, "Which Christians are you talking about? The Christians who are working with the poor and broken on Vancouver's East side? The Christians who are running HIV clinics in Rwanda, or, the Christians who are working with sex-trafficked children in South East Asia?"

But the cynic in me says, "no, they're talking about the nut job who made the evening news"—you know the one—they were holding a sign that read 'God hates environmentalists,' or homosexuals, or a particular ethnic group. The truth of the matter is that I'm more offended by that sign and that person than any atheist could ever be, because they are grossly misrepresenting the God I love.

I wonder, is it possible that Christians have been labelled "judgmental" simply because—on the basis of the Bible—we consider some things to be "right and good" and other things to be "wrong and bad"? I suspect some call us judgmental simply because we dare to draw a line in the sand, even if we don't force our boundaries on anyone else. Suffice it to say, it's one thing to be judgmental and another thing to live within God's boundaries.

But I'm not so naive as to think that individual Christians and Churches haven't earned the judgmental label at times—some people have experienced very real rejection at our hands, and have come to associate God more with condemnation than with love.

I think it's fair to say that none of us aspires to wear the "judgmental" label, and fortunately, Jesus something better in mind for us—let's turn our attention to His words in Matthew 7:1-5.

“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.”

Jesus’ words are simple but they are incisive—they pierce, they cut, they expose. And because Jesus’ words are so straightforward, I will spend less time explaining them, and more time interpreting them. I want us to consider the implication of His words and how they might shape us individually and as a church community.

Explaining The Text

Let’s begin where Jesus does, with His clear warning: *“Do not judge, or you will be judged...with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* It would seem that Jesus has given us a choice within a choice. By choosing to judge another, with severity or with mercy, we are effectively choosing how God will judge us—severely, or with mercy. It strikes me that there is a lot riding on this word, “judge;” *what does it mean?*

When a parent corrects their child, they are making a judgment of sorts. So too is the person who warns a friend about dangerous choices they are making. When someone within our church community wanders from their commitment to follow Jesus, are we

to say nothing at all? Is Jesus suggesting that there is no objective “right or wrong,” and therefore no grounds upon which to judge anyone? Jesus is saying nothing of the sort.

The word “judge,” in the original Greek language, has an enormous semantic range. *Krino* can mean: to assume power over, to call to account, to condemn, to decide, determine, consider, think, or prefer. *So what is it that Jesus is actually prohibiting?*

Allow me to offer a brief conclusion on this matter, and I’ll explain in more detail later in the sermon. **Jesus is condemning is condemnation**—*setting our selves over another person, in the place of God, and speaking a word of death.* Life with God does require us to discern the good from the bad, and the right from the wrong. But we confuse the matter when stand in God’s place and tell someone that their failure is fatal, that they are beyond hope, beyond restoration, and beyond the grace of God.

One scholar offers the following translation of verse 1, *“Do not condemn or you too will be condemned [by God at the judgment].”*¹ With the measure we use, it will be measured to us.

The reason Jesus’ prohibition is so difficult to follow is because, in many respects, the Scripture gives us God’s view of the world—the world as it is, the world as He intends it to be. And armed with His all-knowing perspective, we may know what God thinks but we do not know what He knows, or see as He sees.

¹ Scot McKnight, *The Story Of God Commentary: Sermon On The Mount*, 229.

In vs. 3-5, Jesus makes use of hyperbole—wild exaggeration—in order to get people laughing and thinking all at the same time. Perhaps as Jesus was teaching, He picked up two large sticks (like the 2x4's I brought with me) and held them up to His eyes, saying “*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the 2x4 in your own eye?*”

It's ridiculous to think that someone with 2x4's in their eyes could see anything, let alone a speck of sawdust in another's eyes, but the fool is the one who does not perceive their own blindness. All of us, at times, play the fool—we do not perceive our own blindness—we think we see more clearly than we do.

Jesus' words are simple enough, but how do we centre our lives around them? What are the implications of His words? This morning I want to offer three invitations that flow from His words and from the rest Scripture: the invitation to see God, to see one self, and then, the invitation to see one another.

Invitation #1: See God!

illus: By a show of hands, how many of you grew up attending Sunday School either frequently or infrequently? I still remember many of my Sunday School teachers, I remember the stories they told, the games we played, but perhaps what I remember most is the songs we sang.

For those of you who grew up in the era I did, perhaps you are familiar with songs like *Deep and Wide*, *Jesus Loves The Little Children*, and *I've Got Peace Like A River*. But for the purposes of today, there is one song that I want to draw to your attention. Some

of you will know this song, but perhaps you aren't aware how damaging this song is in terms of the way it portrays God. If you know it, feel free to sing it along with me.

Be careful little eyes what you see, be careful little eyes what you see, for your Father up above, He is looking down in love, be careful little eyes what you see. Be careful little feet where you go, be careful little feet where you go, for your Father up above, He is looking down in love, be careful little feet where you go. Be careful little hands what you do, be careful little hands what you do, for your Father up above, He is looking down in love, be careful little hands what you do.

I've concluded that the melody of this song almost covers over what this song is really about, namely, fear. We need to be careful, or afraid, of what we see, where we go, and what we do—there is danger out there. But ever-so-subtly we are told that the danger isn't just “out there,” there's also danger “up there”.

Note that we have a heavenly Father who is “up above” (not alongside); He's distant, but He's watching everything we see, every place we go, and everything we do. It doesn't sound like He's “looking down in love,” does it? It sounds like He's got a legal pad and He's taking notes.

Envy, gossip, pride, lust, anger (write out on legal pad)—and now, thanks to my sermon—God can add judgement to the list. *Is this what God is like?* When we come to Him, does He rip off the sheet and say, “okay, you're forgiven...we're good for now, but I'm still watching”? No! If you have given your life to Jesus, God has thrown the legal pad away. Romans 8:1 says, “*there is now no condemnation*

for those who are in Christ Jesus,” meaning, you are loved by a gracious, merciful, forgiving Father.

I know that what I’ve just said doesn’t sound radical to many of you—you’ve heard about God’s merciful love many times—but I fear that many of you don’t actually believe it’s true. You actually think of God with His legal pad, scribbling furiously every time you sin—He’s making a list and He’s checking it twice. If I’m describing your image of God, it’s time for a serious upgrade; surrender to His gracious, merciful, forgiving, love.

You may ask, “*what does surrendering to God’s love have to do with judging others?*” The answer is, “*everything!*” Until you see God as He really is—holy and righteous, merciful and loving—you will never see yourself as He sees you, and you will never see others from God’s perspective.

My dear people, God doesn’t love any of us because we are beautiful; we are beautiful because we are loved.² When we know our great need, and experience God’s great mercy, we can begin to extend mercy to others instead of condemnation. When we exchange our failure and shame for God’s forgiveness and love, we can begin to extend forgiveness instead of condemnation. *The one who condemns is blind—both to their own need, and to the grace God has given them.*

If you are keeping in mind the three invitations this morning, you may have noticed that I’ve already crossed over into invitation #2: the invitation to awareness.

Invitation #2: See yourself!

In vs. 4, Jesus says, “*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?*” All of us, at times, play the fool—we point out the weakness of others but are blind to our own. Jesus’ words contain an implicit invitation to be aware of what lies within our own hearts.

Perhaps you have heard of a tool known as the Johari Window; it was designed to aid people in self-awareness (c.f. diagram in slides). According to this tool, self-awareness can be broken down into 4 quadrants: open, hidden, blind, and unknown.

The *Open Self* is the self that both you and others can see. There are things in your life that can be readily observed—you’re an introvert (or extrovert), you’re a thinker (or feeler), you’re impatient (or not), you like adventure (or not), I’m etc.

The *Hidden Self* is the self that you see, but others don’t; this is the part of you that you hide from others. You may act kindly but be enraged on the inside. You may go along with the group’s suggestion, not because of agreement, but because you are afraid to speak out to the contrary.

The *Blind Self* is the self you can’t see, but others can. You might think of yourself as patient, but others know better. You might think of yourself as a team player while others see you as unbending and demanding. All of us are blind to our own blind spots.

² Martin Luther.

The Unknown Self is the self that we can't see, nor can others—this is the self that is known only to God. For example, you may be controlling but you and others may not be aware that your attempt to control is being driven by a desperate fear—you are afraid of failing, afraid of insignificance, afraid of rejection. The good news is that God sees what is unknown to self and others.

You may be asking, “*how can I be aware of what I'm not aware of?*” There are three practices that I want to commend to you. The **first is the practice of listening prayer**. The Holy Spirit sees you as you are; He knows the thoughts and motivations of your heart. And while He doesn't have a legal pad full of your shortcomings, He does want to reveal and transform your character.

Psalm 139 says, “*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” Offer this prayer to God, and then be silent—allow Him to make you aware of what you are not aware of.

The second practice, comes in the form of intentional community. Committing to a community of people is a discipline. Inviting others to reflect back to you what they see in you, is an act of of humility, trust, and wisdom. It takes humility to recognize that we need others in order to grow in Christ. John Calvin once said, “*If God is our Father, then the Church is our Mother;*” our faith in Jesus is nurtured in the company of others.

Proverbs 27:6 says, “*Wounds from a friend can be trusted*”. It takes trust to open yourself to others, to listen to what they see in you (the good and the not so good), and this kind of trust takes time. A small

group is a great place to begin to entrust yourself to others. Ultimately, inviting others to reflect back to you, what they see in you, is an act of wisdom; only a fool thinks they have 20/20 vision. The one who is wise knows that they need the vision of others, particularly when it comes to seeing themselves. The one who is wise prizes this self-knowledge over image-management and self-protection.

The third practice that aids in awareness is the practice of confession. I'm not talking here about the practice of private confession between you and God, nor am I talking about the practice of confession before a priest or pastor; I'm talking about confessing your weakness and frailty before a fellow follower of Jesus.

Regular confession of our own faults and failures has a way of breaking our tendency to judge and condemn others—confession makes us all too aware that we need as much mercy as the person standing in front of us. This drives us to ask for God's generous mercy, for us and for others.

As we turn our attention to Jesus' final invitation, I want you to consider where He has taken us in vs. 1-4. Following His prohibition—*do not judge*—Jesus tells us to address the 2x4 in our own eye. However, in vs. 5 Jesus adds another layer to His teaching. *First, remove the 2x4 from your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.* Invitation #3 is to see one another, to correct one another without condemnation.

Invitation #3: See One Another

There is a reason why people engage in binary thinking—either/or

thinking—the reason being that it keeps things simple (unfortunately too simple). Judging everyone, or, judging no one is simple, clean, and straightforward. But Jesus, and the rest of Scripture, calls us to something else—to discerning right from wrong, good from bad, the kingdom of light from the kingdom of darkness. But more, we are invited into the kingdom practices of love, mercy, and correction (without condemnation).

Correction without condemnation sounds easy enough, but in actual practice, we seldom get the balance right. Instead, we fall into one of two ditches. The first ditch we can label “*hyper-judgmentalism*,” this occurs every time a person or a community appoints themselves as the moral police and gets to work handing out severe penalties for every indiscretion. One of the great dangers in this ditch is that those who embrace it don’t know they’re in the ditch; they think they are travelling on the road.

On the other side of the road, we have another ditch that is perhaps the greater danger in our own day and time—this is the ditch of “*moral indifference*”. In this ditch we quote proverbs like: “*to each their own*,” “*live and let live*,” “*mind your own business*,” and, “*those who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones*”. We say to ourselves, “*Who am I to judge?*,” and then we stick our head in the sand, pretending that all is well and good around us.

In the ditch of hyper-judgmentalism, things like mercy, love, and forgiveness are seldom found—in this ditch failure is fatal because no one will let you forget how badly you screwed up. And there’s no real need for God in this ditch, people are happy to stand in His place and dish out His judgment.

The ditch of moral indifference is just as dangerous. Here, you can do what you want and be what you want, because there’s no boundaries in this ditch, no standard, and no questions asked. In this ditch people talk about “unconditional love” but what they really mean is—*I’m going to do whatever I want and you need to affirm my choices, support my desires, and celebrate my direction—if you don’t, you’re not loving me*. This view of love is so twisted, so co-dependent, I don’t even know where to begin. But needless to say, it’s hard to find God in the ditch of moral indifference because there is no appetite for Him, for His direction, or for His righteousness.

So how do we correct without condemnation? I would suggest that Jesus has already given us the roadmap. We need to see others in the light of our own weakness and failure, in light of our own need. We begin by agreeing that none of stand in the place of God, and, that we need His mercy as much as everyone else.

As we look to Him, and He deals with our junk within, we can live with others and for others. In every community that commits to follow Jesus, there is also a commitment to one another (*for better for worse, in sickness and in health*). As we give ourselves to the practices of community and confession, the correction we offer has earned a kind of relational authority—it passes the smell test because it has already passed the “love” test. The one who receives correction in this kind of community is one who knows how deeply they are loved.

In Ephesians 4:15, the Apostle Paul tells us to speak the truth, in love. Truth without love may pierce but it cannot embrace; love without truth is little more than sentimentalism—it’s neither real, nor life-giving.

As we regularly encounter the love of the Father, we begin to approach the place where correction becomes about restoration and transformation, not about punishment or being “right”. If the correction we offer is laced with contempt, we can be sure that we have crossed over into condemnation. When the Father corrects us, He has in mind to lovingly restore us to fullness of life in Jesus. His correction is always about our well-being; our correction needs to follow suit.

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He came announcing the arrival of God’s Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not a kingdom of condemnation and rejection. His is a kingdom of embrace—mercy, forgiveness, and love. As we enter into this embrace, as we experience it, relish it, celebrate it, we begin to extend His embrace to those around us.

The Kingdom of God is a place where failure is not fatal; it’s a place where we can be forgiven, restored, and transformed. It sounds too good to be true, but it’s not—it’s real and it’s for you. Will you enter in?

Pray

Worship

Benediction