

Total Forgiveness, Part 4

Judging

Judging is a touchy subject and a complicated one. Judging is the opposite of graciousness. The Greek word for to be gracious is *prautes* and means mildness of disposition or gentleness of spirit. When you attempt to right the wrong yourself instead of giving that responsibility to God, where it rightfully belongs, you are not being gracious. To be gracious, instead of judging another and seeking retribution, you make a choice to show mercy. Seek retribution – or show mercy and be gracious; it is a choice.

Judging someone else is almost always uncalled-for criticism. That is what Jesus was referring to when He said, “Do not judge.” He wasn’t telling us to ignore the wrong. He was saying not to administer any uncalled-for criticism that is unfair or unjustified.

R.T. Kendall uses a little acrostic in the word NEED that he finds helpful here. Ask yourself if what you are about to say meets their NEED:

- **Necessary** – Is it really necessary to say this?
- **Encourage** – Will what you are about to say encourage them?
- **Edify** – Will it edify? Will it build them up and make them stronger?
- **Dignify** – Will it dignify that person?

If what you are about to say violates any of these rules, it is probably best left unsaid.

William Perkins (1558–1602) was an influential English cleric and Cambridge theologian. He once said, “Don’t believe the Devil, even when he tells the truth.” Often Satan’s accusations are true. In Revelation 12:10 he is called “the accuser of the brothers.” You may be pointing your finger and speaking the truth, and you may also unwittingly be an instrument of Satan when you do.

The word “judge” comes from the Greek word *kino* which means to make a distinction. This is not in itself a bad thing. Being discriminating can be prudent and wise. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:16 that “the spiritual

person judges all things.” We are called to make righteous judgments, but our subject here is judging people and unfairly criticizing them. Playing God.

Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”

Luke 6:37 “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

Judging others is almost always a bad idea and counterproductive. When we judge, we think *they* need to change, and *we* are the designated change agent to point them in the “right” direction. That will go badly almost every time. They will be offended, solving nothing and making the situation and any relationship worse.

If we resist that urge to play God, Luke 6:37 tells us we will not be judged. Luke teaches us about judging by appealing to our self-interests. We are motivated by his words that we will receive in like kind what we give. If we judge we will be judged ourselves. That sin of judging will be held against us, and we get the discipline that rightfully belongs to the one who wronged us. Basically, Jesus is saying, “If you don’t like being judged yourself, then stop judging others.”

Understand that when people ask for criticism, they are really looking for praise. People do not tolerate true criticism well, and it is easy to criticize someone. We are born with a natural talent for it, usually called our sin nature, and we need no special training to know how to criticize someone. Being critical isn’t being spiritual. The true test of being spiritual is being able to *not* point the finger at others.

Isaiah 58:9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

When you point that accusing finger, it is like a yoke around your own neck. Neither you nor the one criticized will benefit from your “words of wisdom” regarding their character traits. In fact, they will likely be highly offended by your efforts. Focus on what God is calling you to do, which is here seen as to “pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted.” And avoid that finger-wagging tendency.

The apostle Paul said, “The spiritual person judges all things” (1 Corinthians 2:15), but he was referring to making righteous judgments concerning situations and actions relating to ourselves. Such judgments are only possible when we are “spiritual” (walking in the Spirit). These things are not understood by the “natural man” (carnal) because they are “spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). We are not called to judge and unfairly criticize people. That is playing God.

Blessing or Discipline?

You have a choice to judge or bless, and that choice has consequences. Here on earth, the consequence of sin, in this case, judging, is that we will not be “walking in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) and will be separated from the guiding and power of the Holy Spirit. Without that guidance and power, we will be outside our area of operations and in carnality – “fulfilling the desires of the flesh.” We saw in our last session that the way to recovery from this is to confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

We are not called to judge but to bless those who hurt us.

1 Peter 3:9 Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

“That you may obtain a blessing.” In this statement, Peter was probably referring to this fellowship with God and enjoying all the supernatural benefits of that relationship. He calls that fellowship “a blessing.” And a blessing it is to have this anointing of the Spirit in our lives. To take possession of this blessing, we are told the following in Matthew:

Matthew 5:48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

That word translated as “perfect” is *teleios* and is the same root word as the term “it is finished” (John 19:30) uttered by Jesus on the Cross after He was judged for our sins and before He died. It is usually translated by most expositors as having the meaning of being complete or mature. As such, it is seen as having been perfected in the sense of meeting its intended objective exactly as designed. Many apply this interpretation to the word “perfect” in Matthew 5:48 and see it as meaning to be complete in the sense of mature.

While I will admit that doctrinally I am not uncomfortable with the Matthew 5 passage being interpreted that way, but James seems to use it a bit differently. James 1:4 says, “And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be **perfect** and **complete**, lacking in nothing.” Yes, “perfect” is *teleios* but then we also have “complete,” which is a different word *holokleros* that means complete in all its parts, whole, and without blemish or defect. Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament interprets “perfect” here as having moral qualities. Peter makes the same point.

1 Peter 1:15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Considering Peter’s use of phraseology very similar to Matthew’s call for perfection and the use of “perfect” *with* “complete” in James, I think we need to consider the context of our Matthew 5:48 passage a bit more for some clarification.

Consider this: Matthew Chapter 5 begins with the beatitudes and a series of statements beginning with “blessed are,” and all focus on the conduct of believers and how such conduct will be blessed. Verse 12 concludes the beatitudes with the statement, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.” Hold that thought. We will come back to it.

Verses 13-16 describe those so blessed as “a light on a hill” that “gives glory to the Father.” Verses 17-20 speak of those who keep these commandments will be “great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” Then with verses 21 through 47, Jesus launches into a long list of sins that are to be avoided.

What do we have? From the beginning of Matthew 5 all the way up to our study verse 48, Jesus is continuously speaking of the conduct of the believer. In verse 48 He summarizes the passage with the statement that we must be “perfect as our Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:12 has the statement, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,” then in chapter 6 Jesus continues with His charges for righteous conduct, and tells us in 6:19-20 to “not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Note the reference to “rewards in Heaven” and “treasures in Heaven.” Clearly the rewards/blessings are to be found in Heaven.

My point is that all of Chapter 5 and well into Chapter 6 the context is Jesus speaking of the believer’s conduct, specifically for righteous conduct that is captured in the call for us to “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). And that righteous conduct will be rewarded (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18) with treasures in Heaven (Matthew 5:12; 6:20).

So – as I said, “While I will admit that doctrinally I am not uncomfortable with the Matthew 5:48 “perfect” being interpreted as complete or mature, I think the context suggests something more. That “something more” is that the Christian is being called to be perfect in the same sense your Heavenly Father is perfect.

As Your Heavenly Father Is Perfect.

This is a very high standard to meet, but it is not impossible, because we have the indwelling Holy Spirit and His power to meet it. We can meet that standard and be “perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect” but ONLY when we are “walking by means of the Spirit” and while doing so, we are inside the will of God and “not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Our only contribution to the process is to be sure we have no unconfessed sin on our souls and then make a free will decision to trust (faith) that the Spirit can see us through this temptation or situation. If we do that, we will be “perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.”

Furthermore, Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the “fruit” of this “walking in the Spirit” is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control.” That is a nine-word description of the lifestyle Christ lived while here on earth. This is the Christ-life and is a perfect definition of “perfect.” (Pun intended.) We are thus perfect as long as we are in that walk of faith in the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. We still have a sinful nature pulling at us and free will to choose to not to “walk in the Spirit.” You might be inclined to do the “Oh, woe is me. I can’t do this” thing. That’s right, you can’t – of your own power – but you absolutely can with the power of the indwelling Spirit. You need to tap into that! Otherwise, you are outside your AO and in carnality. Out there, you are in the danger zone, but that “perfection” can be regained through repenting, that is, recognizing your stupidity and confessing your sins, in this case, a lack of faith. And you are back into that “perfect status” once more and advancing to maturity.

Rewards / Blessings

That “perfection” is here on earth, but the eternal rewards are received by the believer in Heaven and bestowed (or not) at the Bema Judgment Seat of Christ. Yes, there is a sense that the “walking” in the Spirit” believer is rewarded with those nine graces of the Fruit of the Spirit, but there are more rewards to come in eternity.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

We looked at this in our last session. The Greek word for “seat” is *bema* and should more accurately be translated as “evaluation seat,” because it is the believer’s spiritual life that is evaluated. All Church Age believers will stand before Christ our Judge and explain what we did with all the assets including spiritual gifts that He gave us to use in what He was calling us to do to advance His Kingdom. Did we effectively use those assets or not? Did we accomplish the goals He set for us?

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the

foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Christ laid the foundation through His life, the Cross, His death, and His resurrection. In His life, He test-drove the spiritual life described by those nine words in Galatians 5:22-23 and left it here with the Holy Spirit for us to use. The question at the Bema is did we build upon His foundation? Were our works “good” and done in the leading and power of the Spirit for God's Glory, or were they “evil” done in the leading and power of the flesh outside our AO for our own glory? That is what will be judged (evaluated). These “works” will be tested by fire, and only those done in the leading and power of the Spirit for God's Kingdom (gold, silver, and precious stones) will survive the fire test and be rewarded. The works called “evil” done in the power of the flesh are “wood, hay, and straw,” and they burn up in the fire test as worthless. But whatever the results of the fire test, the one evaluated will be saved. Your salvation is NOT an issue at the Bema, only your works are judged for the purpose of rewards or not. “If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, **though he himself will be saved**” (v.15).

Judging and Jealousy

Usually, when we judge someone it is because we are jealous. Jealousy removes us from our AO, and then we compound the problem with judging. My very first Bible teacher called this “chain sinning” – one sin leads to another. Jealousy is one of the hardest things to see in yourself. We see it in others so easily – but not in ourselves because we don't want to admit we are jealous. Jealousy sometimes springs from our fear that our enemy won't receive justice for what he did to us, so we judge, gossip, and malign our enemy, chain-sin while attempting to inflict our own brand of justice.

Deuteronomy 32:35 Vengeance is mine, I will repay...”

That is quoted twice in the New Testament in Romans 12:9 and Hebrews 10:30. God has clearly staked out that territory as His own and put up big

“no trespassing” signs, and the consequence of ignoring them will be painful.

Is It Ever Right to Judge?

Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

After reading Matthew 7:1 and “Judge not, that you be not judged” it would be easy to conclude there is never a situation in which we can make a judgment concerning others. Then we have verses 3-5, and they suggest there is a condition when it might – maybe – be okay to judge. The passage doesn’t forbid it but rather places a major condition on it. That condition is we had better do some self-examination first and make sure there is nothing in our own eye before attempting to remove the speck from our brother’s eye.

Sometimes it is right to warn someone of another’s behavior. For example, John warned of a troublemaker in the Church.

3 John 9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

And Paul gives similar warnings.

2 Timothy 4:10 For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

2 Timothy 4:14 Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds

When is it right to correct behavior?

When someone who has done great harm and still has the capacity to do so. For example, criminal behavior comes immediately to mind here, or someone who is threatening the unity of the local church or cause more damage as in the examples above, like Diotrephes or Alexander the coppersmith.

But first, we must face our own faults and deal with that “log” in our own eye. In that Mathew 7 passage above, Jesus was addressing the Church, and it should be no surprise that many of our conflicts come from within the family of God. Note that this is in reference to a “brother” meaning a fellow believer in Christ.

We tend to get upset over small issues, specks in another person’s eye, while overlooking the big issue, the log in our own eye. This lack of objectivity disqualifies us from being helpful.

Jesus wants us to see that we have a potentially very serious problem when we are critical and point the finger. The very act of faultfinding is potentially worse than the fault we see in the other person. The criteria for correcting another person demands that we must first look objectively at ourselves.

Here is the question we must first answer: Is our faultfinding the log in our eye, or is it some other sin in our life such as jealousy or arrogance? Often it is both. In reference to the log in our own eye, Jesus is assuming we are rational, sensible people who could see the inconsistency of meddling in the affairs of another person. He assumes if we have no log in our own eye, it would not be unreasonable to offer help. But often our fault is far worse than theirs, and our meddling in their affairs is totally not welcomed. Think about it: if someone meddles in your life, how do you receive their “helpful advice?”

We often find it all too easy to see faults in others but fail to see them in ourselves. Jesus is telling us in Mathew 7 that there are indeed times when

we can be qualified to judge – but only after we have seen to that log in our own eye. It blinds us to our own failings and magnifies the faults of others. Removing that log potentially qualifies us to remove the speck from our brother's eye.

But who can truthfully say they have gotten rid of the log in their own eye? CAUTION! This is dangerous territory. There are many self-righteous Christians out there who think they have no faults and are thus qualified to judge others. Don't think so? I have heard of Christians saying they don't sin anymore.

So, we can ever judge?

If I must know that there is no log in my eye before I can offer any sort of correction, then that pretty much excludes me from being qualified to judge.

Matthew 7:5 is saying one of these three things:

1. No one ever gets rid of the log, therefore no one can ever judge.
2. We can get rid of the log and then (but only then) we can judge.
3. The best solution is when we focus on our own log and then self-effacingly offer correction to another in a way that is welcomed

Obviously, we cannot take total forgiveness to the point where we let off all the rapists, child abusers, and murderers. And should we allow carnal Christians to take over a church and destroy it? Total forgiveness must be balanced with common sense.

Matthew 18:15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

We are called to “restore” and that word is an interesting Greek word *katartizo* from which we get our English word “cauterize,” and it means to mend or make complete, make one what he ought to be. In English, “cauterize” means to burn the skin or flesh of a wound usually with a heated instrument, typically to stop bleeding or prevent the wound from becoming infected. *Katartizo* means to repair what was damaged and make it what it ought to be. Here the “ought to be” is a spiritual person. And that process may be painful for the one with the wound being cauterized. Just as cauterizations are not casually done in the administration of first aid, it should not be done casually on the spiritual level either.

Caution!

The closing statement of Galatians 6:1 is “Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” There is a danger to the one doing the restoring that they will have a log in their own eye. Matthew 18:16 suggests that you take another brother or two with you. They can help determine if the charge against the brother is true or it is a problem of a log affecting *your* vision. Under the Law, two or more witnesses were required for a conviction of a crime. If the brother does not accept your testimony, maybe they will accept the testimony of two or more. Regardless of how many witnesses are involved, the brother should be restored “in a spirit of gentleness.”

On the very top of the order of priorities is self-examination and if you have a log in your eye, repent to remove it. Be certain you are not motivated by bitterness, jealousy, pride, or some other sin that prevents an honest assessment of the situation. This calls for a high degree of self-awareness that can be difficult for some. Recognizing that you have a log in your own eye may very well disqualify you from dealing with the speck in your brother’s eye. Even if you confess the sin, it could render you unable to be an objective judge.

The fact that you are yourself a sinner and perfectly capable of committing whatever sin the brother is being accused of (and you are) should help you be objective. The one who is hardest on himself will probably be the gentlest with others and the most likely to be able to help them. Become more like Christ to be the one most qualified to engage in reconciliation and restoration. Let him know that you recognize the fact that you are also a sinner and have failed of the Lord’s grace.

Avoid becoming emotionally involved. If you cannot, then you are not the one to confront the offender. When Jesus is telling us to remove the log from our own eye, He is telling us that we should disqualify ourselves when we get upset with the one who has the speck. Often someone who is not emotionally involved with the situation is the one best able to help. We will be of little or no help if we are emotionally involved. This person needs to be emotionally detached like a professional counselor.

When We Can't Help Another

We should not become involved with correction when:

- We are emotionally agitated.
- We are personally and emotionally involved.
- Your desire is to punish or get revenge.
- There is jealousy or bitterness in your heart.
- Our self-esteem is involved.

When We Can Help Another

We can become involved when:

- You are in a strategic position to help, and it would be irresponsible to not speak out.
- You have been asked to step in by a responsible person that has no agenda.
- We are utterly impartial and have no emotional baggage.
- Nothing matters more than the honor of God. Be careful that you don't use this falsely and care only about your own honor.
- We are meeting a **NEED**
 - **Necessary** – to say this.
 - **Encourage** – them and make them feel better.
 - **Edify** – and build them up and make them stronger.
 - **Dignify** – that person.

How Should We Receive Criticism?

1. "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."
(Proverbs 15:1). Respond in humility.

2. Agree with them. There is almost always enough truth in the charge. If you can't agree with them, reply with something like, "I see your point."
3. We should thank them. This should defuse their irritation and avoid making an enemy.
4. *Never* defend yourself or try to impress them with how right you were in what you said or did.
5. Ask them to pray with you.