

Judgment, Mercy, and Grace

Among the most-often quoted Scriptures- including those misquoted, I would guess that the top three might well be:

- “*the truth will make you free*,” from John 8:32, though most know neither the location nor that the passage is speaking of divine truth making one *spiritually* free based on *knowing* and *abiding* in it, cf. vv.31-32;
- “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life*,” from John 3:16, though, again, few quoters realize that Jesus has just stated that being “*born again*” requires *water baptism* and *obedience* as a direct result of such *belief*, cf. vv.5,36; and,
- “*Do not judge, lest you be judged yourselves*,” from Matt.7:1, despite the fact that the passage defines the *judgment* under consideration as *hypocritical*, Jesus actually required *righteous judgment* in v.6, and commanded it in John 7:24.

Perhaps not in the top three, but certainly deserving honorable mention is “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*,” from Phil.4:13. Paul is actually addressing his ability to “*be content*” with both *abundance* and *want*, rather than providing a mantra for any and all of life’s challenges, or an inspirational quote designed to promote athletic achievement, cf. vv.11-13.

However, I fear that we sometimes spend so much time and energy refuting erroneous interpretations and applications of these passages that we may well fail to truly comprehend and heed their true meanings. While it’s not my intent to go through each them in this lesson, I would like us to consider the import of Matt.7:1ff a little more carefully.

Points of Consideration

v.1, Despite protestations to the contrary, we all judge one another on many levels and in many ways. As pointed out earlier, we are actually required to make *judgments* regarding others if we would live righteously before God ourselves. For example, *judgment* is required:

- vv.6, to distinguish spiritual *dogs* and *hogs* from those to whom things *holy* and spiritual *pearls* should be given, cf.10:5-15; and,
- vv.15-20, to identify the *false prophets*, *thornbushes*, *thistles*, *bad fruit*, and *rotten trees*.

However, the **kinds** of *judgments* we issue matter, obviously. Though *righteous* judgment is expected, those which are not only **hypocritical** but **hypercritical** are under consideration. The phrase “*lest you be judged yourselves*” doesn’t mean that we can in some way *eternal* judgment from God because we attempt to refrain from *judging* other people, 2Cor.5:10. Nor does it mean that, again, if we attempt to refrain from judging other people that they will necessarily return the favor. What it does mean is that being *judgmental* (hypocritically or hypercritically) generally invites the same in regards to retaliation. Note the next verse...

v.2, The phrase “*in the way you judge*” is the key. Though there are certainly exceptions (cf. Matt.14:1-12), *righteous* judgment generally elicits the same from others the same way that *hypocritical* and *hypercritical* judgments do, cp. Gal.6:7-8; 5:13-14. If we run around jabbing everyone in the eye with a sharp stick, there will be a lot of one-eyed folks lying in wait to jab us in the eye with an equally sharp stick! So, heed the warning of the *Golden Rule* in v.12.

Additionally, we do not want to ignore the fact that God’s *standard of measure* toward us in *eternal judgment* will be determined at least in part by the one(s) we choose to utilize in our *earthly judgments* of toward our fellowman, cf. 18:21-35; (see also Jas.2:12-13).

vv.3-4, Jesus has previously stated the importance of the eye in spiritual matters, cf.6:22-23, and draws upon such here to make His point. One with the *obstructed view* of having a *log* in his own eye makes a poor ophthalmologist to remove a *speck* from another’s eye. While this seems obvious enough to be axiomatic, remember that it is a common malady among us humans to be able to- with what seems to be great clarity, see the failures of others regardless of their size while all the while remaining *blindly* oblivious to our own shortcomings. This trait is certainly not limited to men of the *world* either, cf. Gal.2:11-14.

v.5, The solution Jesus proposes is not to *cease all judgments*- note the words *first* and *then* in the verse. Instead, His point is to *first* remove that which obstructs your own view *before* attempting to help your brother. *First* refers to a *priority* that necessarily requires *subsequent* action after the priority is met, cf. 6:33ff. But, and we cannot miss this point, *first* also requires that the stated priority **must be met before any other action follows**. Please note Rom.2:17-24. Despite their despising condemnation of the Gentiles, the Jews were no better because they did not keep the Law given them, and thus caused “*The name of God to blasphemed among the Gentiles*” because of their own *hypocrisy* and *hypercritical judgments*, see also Matt.23:23-26. And we become their heirs when we fail to *first* remove the *logs* from our own eyes *before* pointing out the *specks* in another’s eye!

Conclusions:

1. We must all make judgments, but we get to choose whether they will be harshly *hypercritical* and *hypocritically* hollow, or righteously-based and tempered with mercy and grace. Choose wisely, Jas.2:12-13.
2. Our judgments of others should always be motivated by love for their soul and rendered in the same manner as we would want to receive if the roles were reversed, Matt.7:12; Col.4:5-6.
3. It is easy to tell someone that they’re wrong if you don’t care whether or not they become right; it is difficult to tell someone that they’re wrong in a way that helps them become right (do it anyway!); but it is virtually impossible to tell someone they’re wrong and help them become right if you’re just as wrong.
4. We must stop demanding *justice* for other’s sins while expecting *mercy* for our own. *Grace* has to be not only our desire for ourselves, but our treatment of others.