

WEEK FIVE: “Do Not Judge”

Opening Reflection

“How easy it would have been for the disciples to adopt a superior attitude, to pass unqualified condemnation on the rest of the world, and to persuade themselves that this was the will of God” (Bonhoeffer, 203)!

What is your reaction to these words?

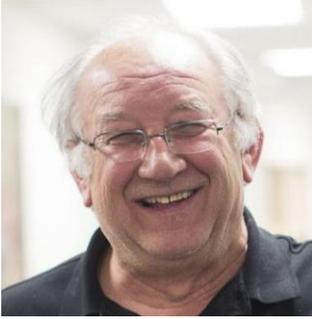


Read **Matthew 7:1-5 (NIV)**:

¹“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For 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? ⁴How 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? ⁵You 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.

1. What do you notice in this passage? What resonates with you?
2. Jesus “is *not* saying that we should become bystanders or that we should not seek justice.... He is also not saying that we should park our ability to discern the good from the bad at the baptismal font” (Amy-Jill Levine, 106). What is the difference between taking responsibility when harm is being done and judging in this passage?
3. Jesus’ teaching shifts the focus from others to ourselves. When is it appropriate to focus on ourselves first?
4. Jesus’ use of hyperbole in the images of the sawdust and the plank is purposeful. Why do you think He uses these images and how do they compare with one another?



Dr. George Hancock-Stefan is Professor of Church History and Missions at Palmer Theological Seminary and recently retired after serving as the pastor of Central Baptist Church in Atlantic Highlands for thirty years. Born and raised in Serbia, he travels regularly to Eastern Europe to teach, and his doctoral dissertation was translated into Romanian and is used by seminaries there. He has a strong interest in church renewal and raised funds to build a church in his hometown.

Listen in as Dr. Hancock-Stefan shares his insight on this text:

Is this passage about judging or about hypocritical judging? For if we take this as many people do that we should never judge, then this passage contradicts other passages uttered by Jesus and the disciples. Jesus speaks about the fact that the words that he speaks will judge the person that rejects Him at the last judgment (John 12:48) Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians that matters of discipline among the church should be judged by them. (1 Cor. 6:3-5) As a professor I always judge and evaluate my students' tests and papers. I welcome my students to challenge the grades I assigned them, promising that I will never decrease their grade in the re-evaluation of the papers.

This passage challenges us to have integrity versus biases and prejudices in my evaluations. I consider that what is holy in this passage is **impartial** judging. God Himself according to Apostle Paul shows no partiality (Rom. 2:11), but we often do. Impartiality is the core here.

The person that accuses another of being judgmental is also making judgments – sometimes good and sometimes bad, some with integrity and some without. Therefore, this passage is challenging all of us to be impartial in the way we interpret or judge.

1. What did you hear Dr. Hancock-Stefan say? Did anything challenge or inspire you?
2. What does it look like to show impartiality?
3. What is the difference between judgement and constructive criticism?

4. What is the danger of judging – an individual, a church, or a group – without first having all of the information?
5. If you could ask Dr. Hancock-Stefan one question, what would it be?



At the heart of the matter

Bonhoeffer said, “When we judge other people we confront them in a spirit of detachment, observing and reflecting as it were from the outside. But love has neither time nor opportunity for this” (204). “Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are” (205-206).

1. When do you feel most tempted to judge others?
2. Bonhoeffer compares judgement with love. How is love the opposite of judging? Where is God inviting you to show more love and less judgement? Where is God inviting the church to show more love and less judgement?
3. Amy-Jill Levine has taught at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution. Her students there have asked, “Would you want to be judged by, or even known by, the worst thing you’ve ever done in your life?” In what ways do we neglect this advice not to see someone by the worst thing they have done? How does this challenge you? How does this challenge the church?

Closing Reflection

“Rather than judging others for the purpose of condemnation, we are better off attending to our own blind spots” (Amy Jill Levine, 107).

If Jesus’ invitation in this scripture is to consider our own selves – our motives, our hearts, our growth areas – what might God be inviting you to pay attention to this week?