The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION TWENTY-FIVE — The Speck and the Log

Part Six: The Two Ways · Texts: Matthew 7:1–5; Luke 6:37–42

The Texts

> **Matthew 7:1–5** *Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get… first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.*
>
> **Luke 6:37–38** *Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you…*

The Most Quoted Verse in the Sermon

We step now into the seventh and final chapter of the Sermon — the home stretch — and Jesus opens it with what may be the single most quoted line he ever spoke, and one of the most misunderstood: "Do not judge."

It is a verse the whole world has memorized. "Judge not" gets flung about as though Jesus forbade ever forming an opinion about anyone's behavior — as though the one moral rule left standing were "mind your own business, and never say anything is wrong." But that cannot be what he means, because the same Jesus, in this very Sermon, will tell us a few sentences later to watch out for false prophets and to know them by their fruits — which takes a great deal of discernment. So he is not switching off our judgment entirely. He is going after something much more specific, and much more familiar: the self-righteous, condemning gaze that loves to size other people up while quietly excusing itself.

Let's search the Scriptures together.

What "Judge Not" Does Not Mean

Let's clear the ground first, because this verse gets stretched in two opposite and equally wrong directions. On one side, people use "judge not" to mean "you may never call anything wrong" — which would gut the entire Sermon we have been climbing, a Sermon relentless about right and wrong, about justice, about naming the log and the speck alike. On the other side, people who love to condemn wave the verse away as if it were soft and toothless. Both miss it. The Greek word for "judge" here means to condemn, to pass sentence, to set yourself up on the bench as another person's judge. It does not mean to discern. Jesus is not forbidding you to tell good fruit from bad; he tells you to do exactly that a few verses on. He is forbidding

you the judge's robe — the presumption of sitting in God's seat and pronouncing final verdicts on other souls.[1]

So hold both truths together, because the Sermon does. You are called to discern — to know right from wrong, to name injustice plainly, to tell true prophets from false. You are forbidden to condemn — to look down from a throne you were never given and write another human being off. Discernment looks at an action and asks, "is this good or harmful, and how do I love well here?" Condemnation looks at a person and declares, "I am the judge, and you are guilty, and I am not." Jesus is dismantling the second without touching the first.

The Measure You Give

And he gives a reason that should stop us cold: "with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." There it is again — that reciprocity that has run all through the Sermon, the same current we met in "forgive us as we forgive" and "blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." The measure you use on others is the measure that comes back around to you. If you deal in harsh, condemning judgment, you have chosen the standard by which you yourself will be measured — and none of us can survive our own strict measure. But if you deal in mercy, in a generous and gracious measure, that too comes back.[2]

This is not God keeping a petty scorecard. It is the same truth we found with mercy: a heart clenched shut in condemnation of others cannot receive the very grace it withholds. The condemning hand is a closed hand, and a closed hand cannot receive. The generous measure opens the hand — to give, and so to receive. How we look at others is, in the end, how we are teaching ourselves to expect God looks at us.

The Speck and the Log

And then Jesus does what he does best — he paints a picture so absurd you cannot forget it, and cannot wriggle out of it. "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? How can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye?" Picture it honestly: a man with an entire roof-beam jutting out of his own eye socket, squinting, leaning in, offering to perform delicate surgery on the sawdust speck in someone else's. It is comedy — and it is us. It is the oldest move in the human heart: a magnifying glass for the neighbor's small faults, and a blind spot the size of a plank for our own great ones.[3]

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[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course. Matthew 7:1–5, with a parallel at Luke 6:37–42 (part of the Sermon on the Plain). This opens the Sermon's final chapter (Matthew 7).

[2]"Judge" (krinō) here means to condemn, to pronounce sentence, to set oneself up as another's judge—not to exercise discernment. The same Sermon commands careful discernment a few verses later ("beware of false prophets… you will know them by their fruits," 7:15–20) and elsewhere Jesus says, "judge with right judgment" (John 7:24). Luke's parallel pairs the command with its positive twin: "do not condemn… forgive… give" (Luke 6:37–38).

[3]"The measure you give will be the measure you get" (7:2) echoes the reciprocity that runs through the Sermon—the forgiveness of 6:12, the mercy of 5:7. A condemning heart, clenched against others, cannot receive the mercy it withholds; a generous, gracious measure opens the hand to receive.

This is the heart of what Jesus means by "judging." It is not discernment; it is hypocrisy — the self-righteous scrutiny that fixes with laser precision on a splinter in someone else while a beam blocks our own sight entirely. And notice the cruel irony of it: the very log we refuse to see is the thing making us unfit to help. We cannot possibly do fine work on another person's eye while our own vision is blocked by a beam. Our unexamined faults do not just make us hypocrites; they make us blind — and blind surgeons are dangerous.

See Clearly Enough to Help

But here is the turn that so many miss, and it changes everything. Jesus does not end the sentence with "so leave the speck alone and mind your own business." He ends it like this: "First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." Do you hear it? The goal was never blindness. The goal is clear sight. Jesus fully expects that there will come a moment to help with your neighbor's speck — he says so plainly — but only after, and never before, you have dealt honestly with your own log.

So "judge not" does not mean we never help each other with our faults; the Kingdom is a community, and love sometimes means the hard, tender work of helping a brother or sister see something they cannot see. What it means is that such help can only ever come from a place of humility, from someone who has first looked long and hard in the mirror, who has felt the weight of their own beam, and who therefore comes not as a judge on a bench but as a fellow patient, gently, with clean hands and no illusions. The order is everything. Log first, then — and only then — the speck. Not condemnation, but restoration "in a spirit of gentleness," as Paul would later put it. First the mirror, then the neighbor.

Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread, and notice how neatly it lands. Condemnation is a way of using other people — propping up my own fragile righteousness by standing on the wreckage of theirs; every verdict I hand down makes me feel a little taller. It is, at bottom, self-serving. But the humility Jesus calls for here is pure freedom-for-others: it deals ruthlessly with my own log precisely so that I can help my neighbor without harming them, love them without looking down on them, tell the truth without towering over them. So ask with me: whose speck have I been studying so I don't have to face my own log? And when I do need to help someone see a fault, do I come as a judge on a throne, or as a fellow patient with clean hands? *Freedom for others may cost us the small, secret pleasure of feeling superior — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- "Judge not" is the world's favorite verse. What do people usually take it to mean — and how is that different from what Jesus is actually forbidding?

[4]The image of the speck (karphos, a splinter or wood-chip) and the log or plank (dokos, a roof-beam) in the eye is deliberate, comic hyperbole in the Sermon's style (compare 5:29–30). Its target is hypocrisy—the self-righteous scrutiny of a small fault in another while blind to a far greater one in oneself.

- Jesus forbids condemnation but commands discernment. Where do you find it hardest to keep those two apart?
- "The measure you give will be the measure you get." What measure have you been using on others — and would you want it turned back on you?
- The log-and-speck is comedy about us. What "speck" in someone else have you been studying while a "log" of your own goes unnoticed?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. Who might you actually be able to help — gently, humbly — once you've dealt with your own log first?

This Week — A Practice

Two movements. First, name the log. Catch yourself, once this week, in the act of judging someone — sizing them up, filing a verdict — and instead of finishing the sentence about them, turn the question on yourself: what log of my own am I not looking at right now? Then do the harder, humbler thing and tend to that. Second, change the measure. Pick one person you have been quietly condemning, and deliberately extend to them the generous measure you would want extended to you — mercy instead of the verdict, curiosity instead of the sentence. Watch what it does to your own heart. Then bring back what you found. This Kingdom, like all the rest, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session, Jesus turns from how we treat one another to how we come to God, with three of the warmest words in the whole Sermon: "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened." And he grounds this bold invitation to pray in the tenderest of pictures — a child asking a parent for bread, and a good Father who longs to give good gifts. After the searching mirror of the log and the speck, a wide-open door.

Benediction

So go this week and take off the judge's robe — it never fit you anyway; the bench was only ever God's. Trade the magnifying glass you keep for other people's faults for an honest mirror, and deal first, and gently, with the beam in your own eye. And when the day comes to help a brother or sister with the speck in theirs — as it will, for love sometimes must — come to them cleared-eyed and humble, a fellow patient and not a judge, with the same generous measure you are longing to receive. Blessed are those who take the log out first, for they alone will see clearly enough to heal — and they will find themselves measured by the very mercy they have learned to give.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION TWENTY-FIVE

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

Welcome back to the table. We step now into the seventh and final chapter of the Sermon — the home stretch — and Jesus opens it with what may be the single most quoted line he ever spoke, and one of the most misunderstood: "Do not judge."

The whole world has this one memorized. "Judge not" gets flung around as if Jesus forbade ever having an opinion about anyone's behavior — as if the one moral rule left standing were "mind your own business, and never say anything is wrong." But that can't be what he means — because the same Jesus, a few sentences later in this very Sermon, tells us to watch out for false prophets and know them by their fruits, which takes real discernment. So he's not switching off our judgment. He's going after something much more specific, and much more familiar — the self-righteous, condemning gaze that loves to size up other people while quietly excusing itself.

[What it doesn't mean.]

So let's clear the ground, because this verse gets stretched two opposite and equally wrong ways. Some use "judge not" to mean "you can never call anything wrong" — which would gut the whole Sermon we've been climbing, a Sermon relentless about right and wrong and justice. Others, who love to condemn, wave it away as soft and toothless. Both miss it. The Greek word here means to condemn, to pass sentence, to set yourself up on the bench as someone's judge. It does not mean to discern. Jesus isn't forbidding you to tell good fruit from bad — he tells you to do exactly that in a minute. He's forbidding you the judge's robe: sitting in God's seat and pronouncing final verdicts on other souls.

So hold both, because the Sermon does. You're called to discern — to know right from wrong, to name injustice plainly. You're forbidden to condemn — to look down from a throne you were never given and write a human being off. Discernment looks at an action and asks, "is this good or harmful, and how do I love well here?" Condemnation looks at a person and declares, "I'm the judge, you're guilty, and I'm not." Jesus dismantles the second without touching the first.

[The measure.]

And he gives a reason that should stop us cold: "with the judgment you make you'll be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." There's that reciprocity again — the same current as "forgive us as we forgive" and "blessed are the merciful, for they'll receive mercy." The measure you use on others is the measure that comes back around to you. Deal in harsh condemnation, and you've chosen the standard you'll be measured by — and none of us survives our own strict measure. But deal in mercy, and that comes back too. It's not God keeping a petty scorecard — it's that a heart clenched shut in condemnation can't receive the very grace it withholds. The condemning hand is a closed hand. And a closed hand can't receive.

[The speck and the log.]

And then Jesus does what he does best — paints a picture so absurd you can't forget it. "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but not the log in your own? How can you say, 'let me take the speck out of your eye,' while there's a log in yours?" Picture it honestly: a man with an entire roof-beam jutting out of his eye socket, squinting, leaning in, offering delicate surgery on the little sawdust speck in someone else's. It's comedy — and it's us. The oldest move in the human heart: a magnifying glass for the neighbor's small faults, and a blind spot the size of a plank for our own big ones.

That's the heart of what Jesus means by judging. It's not discernment — it's hypocrisy. The self-righteous scrutiny that fixes with laser precision on a splinter in someone else while a beam blocks our own sight. And notice the cruel irony — the very log we won't look at is the thing making us unfit to help. You can't do fine work on someone's eye when a beam is blocking yours. Our unexamined faults don't just make us hypocrites — they make us blind. And blind surgeons are dangerous.

[See clearly to help.]

But here's the turn so many people miss, and it changes everything. Jesus does not end the sentence with "so leave the speck alone and mind your own business." He ends it: "first take the log out of your own eye, and then you'll see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's." Hear that — the goal was never blindness. The goal is clear sight. Jesus fully expects there'll come a moment to help with your neighbor's speck — he says so — but only after, never before, you've dealt honestly with your own log.

So "judge not" doesn't mean we never help each other with our faults — the Kingdom's a community, and love sometimes means the hard, tender work of helping someone see what they can't. It means that help can only come from humility — from someone who's first looked long and hard in the mirror, felt the weight of their own beam, and comes not as a judge on a bench but as a fellow patient, gently, with clean hands and no illusions. The order is everything. Log first, then — and only then — the speck. Not condemnation, but restoration in a spirit of gentleness. First the mirror, then the neighbor.

[The thread and practice.]

So here's our question this week — freedom for others: condemnation is really a way of using people, propping up my own fragile righteousness on the wreckage of theirs — every verdict I hand down makes me feel a little taller. But the humility Jesus calls for is pure freedom-for-others — it deals ruthlessly with my own log precisely so I can help my neighbor without harming them, love them without looking down. So: whose speck have I been studying so I don't have to face my own log? And when I do need to help someone see a fault, do I come as a judge on a throne, or a fellow patient with clean hands?

Two things to practice. First, name the log — catch yourself once this week judging someone, and instead of finishing the sentence about them, turn the question on yourself: what log am I not looking at? Then tend to that. Second, change the measure — pick one person you've been quietly condemning, and extend to them the generous measure you'd want extended to you: mercy instead of the verdict, curiosity instead of the sentence.

Next time, Jesus turns from how we treat each other to how we come to God — three of the warmest words in the Sermon: "ask, search, knock." A child asking a parent for bread, and a good Father who longs to give good gifts. After the searching mirror of the log and the speck — a wide-open door.

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go and take off the judge's robe — it never fit you anyway; the bench was only ever God's. Trade the magnifying glass you keep for other people's faults for an honest mirror, and deal first, and gently, with the beam in your own eye. And when the day comes to help someone with the speck in theirs — as it will, because love sometimes must — come cleared-eyed and humble, a fellow patient and not a judge, with the very mercy you're longing to receive.

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Blessings, Pastor Mick Finch.