

THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

Session 36

JUDGE NOT?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN `JUDGE NOT'

We come now to the last major section of the Sermon on the Mount. There is much disagreement as to the right way of approaching it. Some would regard chapter vii of Matthew's Gospel as just a collection of aphoristic statements with very little internal connection between them. But it seems to me that that is quite a mistaken view of this section of the Sermon, because there is quite clearly an underlying theme in the entire chapter, that of judgment.

It is as if our Lord were saying that the final thing which matters is not what men think of us, but what God thinks of us.

The Christian is a man who should walk through this life as conscious that it is but transient and passing, a kind of preparatory school. He should always know that he is walking in the presence of God, and that he is going on to meet God; and that thought should determine and control the whole of his life.

We are undergoing a process of judgment the whole time, because we are being prepared for the final judgment; and as Christian people we should do all things with that idea uppermost most in our minds, remembering that we shall have to render an account. That is the controlling theme in this chapter.

There is nothing that so utterly condemns us as the Sermon on the Mount; there is nothing so utterly impossible, so terrifying, and so full of doctrine. Indeed, I do not hesitate to say that, were it not that I knew of the doctrine of justification by faith only, I would never look at the Sermon on the Mount, because it is a Sermon before which we all stand completely naked and altogether without hope. Far from being something practical that we can take up and put into practice, it is of all teaching the most impossible if we are left to ourselves.

We are confronted here by a statement which has often led to a great deal of confusion. Admittedly it is a subject that can be very easily misunderstood, and it can be misunderstood on two sides and from two extremes, as is almost invariably the case with truth.

Never, perhaps, was a correct interpretation of this injunction more important than at this present time. This is so because the whole atmosphere of life today, and especially in religious circles, is one that makes a correct interpretation of this statement quite vital. We are living in an age when definitions are at a discount, an age which dislikes thought and hates theology and doctrine and dogma. It is an age which is characterized by a love of ease and compromise-'anything for a quiet life', as the expression goes. It is an age of appeasement. It is an age that dislikes strong men because, it says, they always cause disturbance. It dislikes a man who knows what he believes and really believes it. Such men today are regarded as being difficult, self-assertive, non-co-operative and so on. The man who is now glorified is the man who can be described as being in 'the middle of the road', not at one extreme or the other, a pleasant man, who does not create difficulties and problems because of his views. Life, we are told, is sufficiently difficult and involved as it is, without our taking a stand on particular doctrines. There are many who say that 'judge not' must be taken simply and literally as it is, and as meaning that the truly Christian man should never express an opinion about others. They say that there must be no judging whatsoever, that we must be easy, indulgent and tolerant, and allow almost anything for peace and quiet, and especially unity.

I suggest, in the first instance, that it cannot be; and it cannot be, quite clearly, because of Scripture teaching itself.

Look at verse 6, 'Give not that which is holy unto the dogs...

Then again, take the more remote connection in verse 15: 'Beware of false prophets...

Our Lord also says, 'Ye shall know them by their fruits'; but if I am not to have any standard or exercise discrimination, how can I test the fruit and discriminate between the true and the false? So, without going any further, that cannot be the true interpretation.

We must go further and put it like this: the Scripture itself teaches us that judgment has to be exercised in connection with affairs of State. It is Scripture which teaches

us that judges and magistrates are appointed of God and that a magistrate is called upon to deliver and pronounce judgment, that it is his duty to do so. It is part of God's way of restraining evil and sin and their effects in this world of time.

You also find the same teaching in the Scriptures with regard to the Church.

When did you last hear of a person being excommunicated?

The Protestant definition of the Church is, 'that the Church is a place in which the Word is preached, the Sacraments are administered, and discipline is exercised'.

Discipline, to the Protestant Fathers, was as much a mark of the Church as the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. But we know very little about discipline.

This question of judging applies, also, in the matter of doctrine. Here is this question of false prophets to which our Lord calls attention. We are supposed to detect them and to avoid them. But that is impossible without a knowledge of doctrine, and the exercise of that knowledge in judgment. Paul writing to the Galatians says, 'But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.' That is a clear pronouncement. Then you remember what the apostle has to say in I

Corinthians xv about those people who were denying the resurrection.

He says the same thing in 2 Timothy ii when he says that some deny the resurrection, saying it is past already, 'of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus'; and he again expresses judgment with regard to that and exhorts Timothy to do so.

In writing to Titus he says, 'A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.'

Then go on to John's Epistles, John 'the apostle of love'. In the First Epistle he gives his instructions with regard to the false teachers and the anti-Christ who were to be avoided and rejected. Indeed, in his second Epistle, he puts it very strongly in these words: 'If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.'

Then you find the same thing in our Lord's words to the Jews elsewhere: 'Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment' (John vii. 24).

You remember His injunction as to what we are to do if our brother trespass against us; we are to go to our brother and tell him his fault 'between thee and him alone'.

In 1 Corinthians v and vi you will find that Paul gives exactly the same teaching. He tells the Corinthians not to keep company with a man who is an idolater, but to withdraw themselves. That is judgment the whole time.

If, then, it does not mean that, what does it mean?

He is not telling us that we are not to make these assessments based on judgment, but He is very concerned about the matter of condemning.

to walk by faith means to walk on a knife edge. You can fall on this side or that; you have to keep on the dead center of truth, avoiding the error on the one side and on the other. So that while we say that it does not mean the refusal to exercise any discrimination or thought or judgment, we must hasten to say that what it does warn against is the terrible danger of condemning, of pronouncing judgment in a final sense.

He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone.'

What is this danger against which our Lord is warning us? We can say first of all that it is a kind of spirit, a spirit which manifests itself in certain ways.

What is this spirit that condemns? It is a self-righteous spirit. Self is always at the back of it, and it is always a manifestation of self-righteousness, a feeling of superiority...feeling that we are all right while others are not. That then leads to censoriousness, and a spirit that is always ready to express itself in a derogatory manner. And then, accompanying that, there is the tendency to despise others, to regard them with contempt. I am not only describing the Pharisees, I am describing all who have the spirit of the Pharisee. It seems to me, further, that a very vital part of this spirit is the tendency to be hypercritical. Now there is all the difference in the world between being critical and being hypercritical. True criticism is an excellent thing. Unfortunately there is very little of it.

i Corinthians xiii.

The best commentary in this connection is found in Romans xiv where Paul tells the Romans at great length to avoid judging one another in matters like food and drink, and regarding one day above another. They had been exalting these matters to a supreme position, and judging and condemning in terms of these things. But Paul tells them that that is all wrong. See Romans 14:17

The Lord is the Judge. Furthermore, you do not decide whether a man is a Christian or not by regarding his views on matters such as these, which are unimportant, and matters of indifference.

If we ever know the feeling of being rather pleased when we hear something unpleasant about another, that is this wrong spirit. If we are jealous, or envious,

It shows itself in a readiness to give judgment when the matter is of no concern to us at all. How much of our time do we spend in expressing our opinion about people who really have no direct dealings with us? They are nothing to us, but we experience a malicious pleasure in doing so. That is part of the way in which it shows itself in practice. To impute motives is always a manifestation of this spirit of judgment.

A further way in which we may know whether we are guilty of this, is to ask if we habitually express our opinion without a knowledge of all the facts. QUOTE

WOW... **We should search for all the facts and then judge. To do otherwise is to be guilty of this Pharisaical spirit. (Social Media)**

QUOTE: This spirit really manifests itself in the tendency to pronounce final judgment upon people as such. This means that it is not a judgment so much on what they do, or believe, or say, as upon the persons themselves. It is a final judgment upon an individual, and what makes it so terrible is that at that point it is arrogating to itself something that belongs to God.

But our Lord turned and rebuked them and said, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.' They were guilty of forming and passing a final judgment on those people and proposing to destroy them.

'...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us', that not one of us stands in his own righteousness, but in the righteousness of Christ. Without Him we are damned, utterly lost. We have condemned ourselves by judging others.