

Home Group Study Material for w/c 19th Apr 2010
Matthew 7:1-6: Judge and Jury

Suggested questions for discussion – as usual please modify them as appropriate for your group

Remember that these verses address the very down-to-earth issue of unfairly critical attitudes to others, which when combined with a naive lack of self-criticism threaten to disrupt a close-knit first-century community such as that of Jesus' first disciples... or a twenty-first century community such as Southover Church. We must all be very careful how we judge others. Only the Lord can see beyond the outward appearance to underlying motives and causes in a person's heart.

1. *'Ice-breaker' question:* By painting the obviously ridiculous scenario in verses 3-5 Jesus is clearly using humour to make his teaching point. What other examples of humour can you think of in the Bible?
2. For some reason humans seem to find it much easier to spot blemishes in others than ourselves (verse 3 and 4). Firstly, why do you think this is? Secondly, what can we do about it?
3. Having a generally judgmental attitude is closely related to having an unforgiving attitude. Jesus made it clear his disapproval of this too (e.g. Matt 18:21-22). How can we try to ensure that we display a positive attitude towards others? What are the "planks" in our own eyes? How should we go about taking them out (verse 5)?
4. It is important to realise that Jesus' words in verse 1 do not mean that we are never to judge others as verses 5 and 6 make clear. However it should probably happen less than we think it should. Also we need to be very careful how and when we do it.

In what circumstances might it be appropriate? How should it be done in practice? If possible encourage some sharing of personal examples both of getting it right and getting it wrong

Hint: You might want to consider ideas such as:

- The principle of fairness – both in our observations and interventions
 - We should only proceed when our own hearts are right before God – see Matt 18:15-17
 - Any judgements must be based on God's principles not our opinion
5. Jesus leaves us with a final thought from verse 6: even when we are right, we cannot impose the truth on others. Christians must exercise discernment because not everyone is a sheep. Some people are "dogs" or "pigs". It is a wise Christian who first assesses the condition of a person's heart before sharing the precious pearls. While it is true that we must share the Gospel with everyone (e.g. Mark 16:15), it is also true that we must not cheapen the Gospel by a ministry that lacks discernment.

The reason for judgment is not that we might condemn others, but that we might be able to minister to them.

With this in mind, what specific action could we personally do in the next few days to encourage another and help build up our community here at Southover?

Issued by Jeremy Bamber
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