

## ***“Don’t Blame Me”***

*Matthew 7:1-12*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • April 21, 2013

My first job after college was for a garment-manufacturing facility in Louisiana which was part of a large, multi-national corporation with its headquarters in the Empire State Building in New York. It was a typical large corporation and every corporate cliché you can think of was true in this company. While I was working there we learned the six stages in any project. It doesn't matter what kind of project. These stages usually turn out to be accurate, especially for government projects.

The first stage is *unbounded enthusiasm*. Everyone is excited about the project. There's energy in the office. Everything looks great. But that doesn't mean everything *is* great. So the second stage is *total disillusionment*. Things aren't going quite according to plan. That leads to stage three, *panic*. The last three stages are the *frantic search for the guilty, punishment of the innocent, and promotion of the uninvolved*.

Obviously this is intended to be funny but it illustrates a point. When things don't go exactly right how quickly do we begin to try to find out who is to blame? In the corporate world they call that "blamestorming," the meeting that's held to try to figure out who to blame. Just as important we want to minimize our own responsibility and say, "Don't blame me."

Today we live in a culture of blame. Everything that goes wrong in our lives must be someone else's fault. For example, last month a man sued Macy's Department Store after he walked face first into a heavy glass display in the middle of the aisle and fell to the floor. The man claims he is in no way responsible for the accident. In February, a graduate student sued Lehigh University in Pennsylvania for 1.3 million dollars because she received a C+ in a class.

Last year, after ruining his \$73,000 pool table, a man sued the manufacturer for "hiding" the warnings in the instruction manual.

We have a tendency to notice the faults in other people, and to point them out, but we can't see our own faults. Jesus put it like this: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" Jesus sometimes likes to exaggerate in order to make his point, and this is one of those times. He is pointing out the way that each of us tends to point out the shortcomings of others while we minimize our own faults. Jesus says that the sin in our own life is like a log. The word for log refers to the large beams that were used in the roof of a building. The point is that our personal sin is a big problem. It's what separates us from God and from other people. R.C. Sproul writes, "When we have planks in our eyes, we consider them specks. When we see specks in others' eyes, we view them as planks. This is how sin destroys human relationships and community."

This is the context in which Jesus says, "Judge not, that you be not judged." Almost everyone in our society knows that these words are in the Bible. In fact, they have become sort of a rallying cry for our age. In our culture today the greatest sin is to declare that something or someone is wrong. "Who are you to judge me?" is a common saying. They point to this verse and say, "Jesus said not to judge." But is that really what he said? In verse 6 he says, "Do not give dogs what is holy." Certainly we have to judge to decide who the "dogs" are. Later on in chapter 7 we'll see that he says, "watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Disciples must judge

who is a false prophet and who is a true one. Then in Matthew 18 Jesus says, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault.” In this case Jesus is saying that you not only have to judge that your brother has sinned, you have to confront him.

To understand what Jesus means when he says, “Judge not,” we have to look at the verse within the context of the whole passage. Clearly Jesus is not asking us to stop judging between right and wrong. Instead, the context makes clear that Jesus is telling us not to *condemn* others. The original Greek for “judge not” is what’s called a present imperative, which means that it represents a present, ongoing action. A better way of translating it might be, “stop condemning so that you will not be condemned.” Jesus is warning us not to use his teaching to condemn others.

I think the best way for us to understand this is that Jesus intends for us to hear his teaching as applying to us personally. Sometimes we read a passage or hear a message and think that our spouse or our kids really need to hear it so we give them a little nudge with the elbow to make sure their paying attention. But Jesus tells us to apply it to our own life first before we try to use the teaching on someone else. And then he warns us that God will judge each of us by the standard to which we hold other people. That can be a standard of judgment or it can be a standard of mercy. If we want to receive mercy from God, we should be showing mercy to others.

Now Jesus is not saying that we should never correct a fellow believer who is caught in sin. He means that we can help others with their sins after we deal with our own sin. That’s the principle that makes programs like AA so successful. The person who is dealing with the log in his own eye is better able to help someone else with the same problem, but he must remember to view the other person’s issue more like

sawdust than a log. We are to see our own sins as large and the sins of others as small.

Then we come to verse 6 and one of those strange sayings of Jesus that don’t seem to make any sense. He says, “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.” Jesus has just said not to be critical and condemning of other people and then he seems to require that we judge certain people to be “pigs” or “dogs.” In Jesus’ day, pigs were unclean animals that were to be avoided. Likewise, dogs refers to wild animals who were scavengers and therefore unclean, not pets.

Is Jesus contradicting himself? It seems harsh to refer to people as dogs or pigs. Again, the context is important. Jesus is probably using what scholars call “instructive irony.” The actual meaning is the opposite of what it would appear to be. The “pearls” that Jesus mentions would be our criticisms of others. These are the “pearls of wisdom” that we have gleaned from Jesus teaching and we want to share these gems with the sinners who need to hear them, the people we would call dogs or pigs. Jesus says that when these people perceive your attitude toward them they will trample your “wisdom,” and then turn and attack you.

This verse also means that we are to be discerning about how we share holy things, the Word of God, with people. There’s an old saying that you should never wrestle with a pig. You both end up getting muddy but the pig likes it. There are times when the words of truth, like those that Jesus teaches here, will not do more harm than good. In those instances it’s better to remain silent and not try to force our message on people who are hostile to it. This principle alone would go a long way on social media websites like Facebook where people love to post things that will anger

others. Jesus insists that we have an obligation to love these people, which sometimes means confronting sin and sometimes means keeping silent.

Finally, Jesus says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” These verses deal with prayer. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of his ministry, Jesus sets impossibly high standards for us. He forbids anger and lust, he tells us not to worry and instead we are to give generously, and he says, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” If we are serious about our walk with God and honest with ourselves, it becomes obvious that we fall short of what Jesus demands. But the same Jesus who gives us these standards is also the one who came to save those of us who do not keep his laws.

When he commands us to “ask,” he is telling us to go to the Father in prayer, to ask for aid in becoming more like Christ. We are asking for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. Jesus says that “everyone who asks receives.” He also tells us to “seek.” Seeking is still a part of prayer. We seek God where he is most likely to be found, in his Word, the Bible. “The one who seeks finds.” Lastly, Jesus says to knock and it will be opened. Knocking indicates that there is something

that is inaccessible. A closed door. But God will open the door for us. Each of these three is also in the present imperative, so that they mean, “keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking.”

The final verse in this passage is what is commonly referred to as the Golden Rule. “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Jesus didn’t make up this rule, it’s found in almost every ancient culture. Except that it was always in the negative. Don’t do to other people what you don’t want done to you. The problem with stating it in the negative is that you can keep this rule by doing nothing. Jesus turns the rule upside down. The way Jesus states it moves us to action. We are now obligated to do for others what we wish would be done for us. Put another way, love your neighbor as yourself. Because “with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” God has already done much for you. He came here in person to save you. Because of the grace and mercy God has shown you, how about showing the same to other people.

*Amen*