

Week of January 8-14

TO JUDGE OR NOT TO JUDGE?

Scripture Reading: Read Matthew chapter 7

In one of the key scenes from Shakespeare's Hamlet, the main character launches into a soliloquy with the words, "To be or not to be, that is the question." Freely paraphrasing, we must ask ourselves after reading today's text, "To judge or not to judge, that is the question."

In the opening verses of Matthew 7, we are expressly told not to judge. Yet later on in the chapter, Jesus warns his followers to watch out for false prophets whom we will recognize by their production of bad fruit, an action that seems to imply some level of judgment. So, which is it? Do we judge or do we not?

Actually, Jesus calls us to do both. In the opening verses, Jesus is addressing the self-righteous, hypocritical judgments that we often make when we see a fault in a brother or sister. We have our own unresolved stuff, the plank in our eye, but we stand in judgment over someone else for some sin we see in their life, the speck in their eye. This type of judging is forbidden to believers for a number of reasons. First of all, it's harmful to our brother or sister. It brings ungodly condemnation on them, traps them with guilt and extends no grace for healing. Secondly, it harms relationships. It is difficult to be relationship with someone who is always fault-finding in our lives. Thirdly, it sets us up for receiving judgment from Christ instead of mercy, for Jesus said that with whatever measure we use it will be measured to us again. Finally, it harms our witness to the world. One of the chief complaints that unbelievers have about Christians is that we are judgmental. Jesus calls us to deal with our own planks and, then, with humility, to assist our brother or sister in dealing with their specks.

On the other hand, Jesus makes it clear that we must be discerning when dealing with false prophets, those individuals who claim to be in the kingdom when they are actually wolves in sheep's clothing. We cannot be naïve and assume that everyone who claims to be a believer is, in fact, one. As the coming of Christ draws near, we are to remember that both Jesus and Paul predicted that false prophets would arise. It is imperative that we grow in discernment to be able to "judge" what is true and what is false.

To judge or not to judge? The answer is yes! We are to do both.

Action Step: Take some time today to evaluate "judgments" you have made recently. Have there been some that flowed out of self-righteous pride? Do you have some "planks in your eye" the Lord needs to remove? Is there a brother or sister before whom you need to repent for trying to remove their speck before you removed your plank? Evaluate your level of spiritual discernment. Does it need to grow?

Prayer Focus: Repentance for self-righteous judgments and a sharpening of discernment

Take-a-way: *Avoiding planks and discerning fruit is the biblical way to judge.*