

THE BOOMERANG EFFECT MATTHEW 7:1-5

When I was a little boy I was fascinated by boomerangs. I was intrigued by how a person could throw an object in one direction, how that object could fly for a considerable distance in that direction, and then suddenly circle back and return to the thrower. It seemed to defy the laws of nature. Of course, there are scientific reasons that explain why a boomerang does what it does. But that doesn't make it any less remarkable.

I'm not sure who created the first returning boomerang, but I suspect it may have been an accidental discovery. Because boomerangs were originally used by the aborigines in Australia as weapons to kill wild game. Those boomerangs were also "L-shaped", but they were balanced and symmetrical, so they could be thrown with accuracy during a hunt. If it was an accidental discovery, I can only imagine the horror on the hunter's face when he saw his weapon circle back and head straight for him.

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus talked about another kind of weapon that can have a dangerous boomerang affect. That weapon is comprised of careless words that come from a critical or condemning spirit. He tells us that those who use their words as weapons will themselves be wounded.

Jesus says in **Matthew 7:1-2**. *Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

In this passage Jesus is talking about our perceptions, attitudes, and relationships with other people. Not just people who are different than us, or whose behavior and mannerisms irritate us, but all people. We are just as likely to be critical or condemning of family members and friends as we are with people who are strangers or enemies.

But what exactly does Jesus mean when He says, *"Do not judge?"*

You probably know that this is now the most frequently quoted statement in the Bible because it seems to support our view of tolerance. Our culture that proudly asserts that there is no such thing as right and wrong and those who have the audacity to think so are bigots. The greatest sin today is thinking you are right, or calling something wrong. And so, people have interpreted this verse to mean you shouldn't call sin "sin," otherwise you're being judgmental.

But that's not what Jesus means here. Not all judging is wrong, nor is it always prohibited. Earlier in this sermon Jesus was being judgmental when He said, *"Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven"*. In 7:6 He makes a judgment when He compares some people to dogs and pigs. And later in this chapter He tells us to watch out for *false* prophets, comparing them to ferocious wolves (7:15). In order for us to identify false prophets we have to make judgments about what is right and wrong, true and false.

Elsewhere in the New Testament we are told that we must not tolerate sin in the church. In 1 Corinthians Paul tells us we must not even associate with those who claim to be believers but are living in sin (5:11). And then he says, *"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?"* (5:12). The obvious answer to that rhetorical question is "yes," we are.

There are times when we have to judge—indeed we are commanded to judge. That judgment is necessary to ensure our spiritual health, to protect the church from damaging influences, and to restore brothers and sisters who are walking in the darkness.

But that's not the kind of judging Jesus is talking about in Matthew 7. He is talking about a destructive kind of judging. A condemning or critical spirit.

It's one thing to evaluate someone's behavior or critique their theology in the light of Scripture; it's quite another to level a personal attack against their character or their motives or their mannerisms. And that is the kind of judging that Jesus is talking about in these verses. It is the intent to put someone down or put someone in a negative light.

That kind of judging was rampant in Jesus' day, and it still is. You can see it in Washington among our politicians. You can hear it on talk radio, read it in the newspapers, and watch it on the nightly news. Unfortunately, it is prevalent in religious circles as well.

Remember, Jesus was addressing an audience steeped in religion, where esteem, position, and status were given on the basis of how high one had climbed on the ladder of religiosity. The belief was that if you pray enough, fast enough, or give enough, you could achieve a certain status in the community and be a rung or two above the others. Of course, as you are making the ascent to this "superior" position you'll want to make sure that you step on a few of those people below you. That way you can hinder *their* progress and make sure you stay on top.

How do you do that? You put people down, criticize their faults, point out their flaws, magnify their weaknesses, and exploit their failures.

Do you remember the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went up to the temple to pray? The Pharisee stood up and said, *"God, I thank you that I'm not like other men. Robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get"* (Luke 18:9f.)

It's part of our sinful nature to size people up and then measure them against ourselves. And usually, like the Pharisee in the story, we create some external and often arbitrary standards by which we do that—standards that makes *us* look better than them, so we can feel superior.

And when we feel superior we somehow think we are qualified and entitled to judge others. But Jesus makes it clear that the person who judges is not primarily exposing the sin in others, but in himself. The condition of his own heart is revealed for what it is: Proud, loveless, careless, graceless—things that God despises and are contrary to His nature.

And that brings up the real danger in judging others. **Verse 1.** *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged"* (NIV).

Jesus just got through talking about worry at the end of chapter 6. He told us there is no reason we should fret over the daily necessities of life—like food and clothing—because we have a heavenly Father who loves us so much He is going to take care of us. The One who feeds birds and clothes flowers will certainly take care of us, since *we* are far more valuable.

However, in this, the very next sentence, He tells us that God doesn't just care about me, He cares about those I rub shoulders with. He loves those people that have mannerisms and personality traits that get on my nerves. He delights in those whose preferences and opinions and idiosyncrasies rub me the wrong way. So when I judge them—when I have a critical or condemning spirit toward them—I am being disrespectful toward people that are precious to God. And when I judge them I am walking on thin ice, because God is going to judge me for that. And *that* is something to worry about.

Verse 2. *"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

Later in the chapter is the famous verse, “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” Here Jesus says, “Whatever you *do* to others will be *done* to you...at least when it comes to judging.”

I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrases these verses. *“Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment.”*

The rabbis who lived at this time had a saying: “God deals with two measures—justice and mercy.” Jesus says, “That’s correct. And whatever of those measures you use, will be used with you.” In other words, if you use justice, you’ll get justice; if you use mercy, you’ll get mercy.

What do you want to happen to people who have failed? People who have done something foolish and are suffering the consequences for it? People who have made choices that had destructive consequences? Do you want them to get what they deserve? Or do you want them to receive mercy?

Whatever measure you use with others, will be used with you. When you want justice for others, you may get it for yourself, too. And I guarantee that justice is not what you want for yourself. You *want* mercy. *Everyone* wants mercy. So then, *give* mercy to everyone, and you’ll get it back from God.

So we need to be very careful what we say to people or what we say about people. Our words are powerful. They can be used to accomplish so much good, but they can also be used as weapons. Here Jesus says that those who use their words as weapons will themselves be wounded.

Jesus continues in **verses 3-5**. *3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”*

People who are critical and condemning of others, people who are faultfinders, people who hastily make assumptions and carelessly jump to conclusions are like a person with a telephone pole sticking out of his face pointing to someone with a splinter in his eye and saying, “Man, how can you live with that thing? Let me take it out for you.”

It’s funny because we all know how true it is. We’ve all seen people who are adamant and relentless about pointing out the flaws and failures of others, but are oblivious to their own faults, which are so much more obvious. We’ve all seen people who magnify the inconspicuous blemishes and defects of others, yet are unaware that their own blemishes and defects are glaring.

How can this be? It’s because we have, in our natural states, hearts that are deceitful above all else and desperately wicked. We are easily deluded—not so much about others, but about ourselves. Our hearts, in their natural states, don’t possess much grace or mercy. We don’t naturally give people the benefit of the doubt. We are naturally critical. We are not naturally accepting; we are naturally condemning.

It is only when we have been transformed by the God of grace and mercy, and it’s only when we stay connected to the Source of grace and mercy that we are able to respond to others with unconditional love and unmerited favor.

If you have never let God change your heart and give you His heart through faith in Jesus Christ, you’ll never be able to be truly gracious and merciful. Genuine grace and mercy are not qualities that we can generate on our own. They are supernatural qualities given

when God changes our hearts and gives us His heart.

If you are a stranger to grace and mercy then I invite you to flee to the foot of the cross and ask the Lord Jesus who died for you to be merciful to you—to forgive your sins and give you a new heart and a new nature. And He *will* do it.

But even after He does it, we need to stay connected to His heart. When we let sin come between us and God it's not long before we become hardened by sin's deceitfulness. And it can happen to any of us.

David was called a man after God's own heart. But do you remember what happened to David's tender and compassionate heart after he had sinned? It turned into a hardened and deceitful heart. And there is a story that illustrates this.

We read in **2 Samuel 12:1-12**. *The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.*

⁴ "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." ⁵ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

⁷ Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹ Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.' (2 Sam 12:1-10).

This is an illustration of someone pointing out the speck in a person's eye while having a log in his own eye. It also illustrates how one can be completely oblivious to his own guilt, while vehemently condemning another person for something that is not nearly as serious.

This happens all the time. Someone wisely said, "The greatest fault of all is to be conscious of none."

We have no business pointing out other people's faults when our own faults may be even more obvious and odious. More importantly, we have no right to condemn others when we ourselves deserve to be condemned. Every one of us is indebted to the grace of God, and to have a critical or condemning spirit is an indication that we are either strangers to the grace of God, or our hearts have become hardened to the degree that we are no longer conscious that everything we are and have and hope for is solely by His grace.

Let me ask you something: How do you stand in relation to this passage? By the way, some of you might be thinking, "Well...I've got opinions about people, but I never express them. I keep my thoughts to myself."

All along in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has said that it's not merely what you do and say, it's what you think and feel in your heart. Jesus is talking here about a critical spirit.

You can be guilty of judging if you merely condemn a person in your own mind. You can be judgmental by merely forming an opinion about a person and then deciding you don't want to have anything to do with them. You can judge by merely hearing about what someone has done and saying to yourself, "I hope they get what they deserve."

This passage is not just about what you say or do; it is about what you think and feel. If you have a problem with judging others and you want to overcome please listen carefully. The first thing to do is confess it as sin before God and repent. You need to call it what it is—pride, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, hatred, insecurity, whatever is at the root of it. Then you need to let God forgive you and change your heart.

Next, you must live, each and every day, in the shadow of the cross. That's where you first received mercy and grace, and that's where you will find the inexhaustible source of mercy and grace that others so desperately need, and that Jesus wants you to express to them. Remember what Jesus did for you. Remember what you deserve but didn't get, and remember what you got but didn't deserve.

Next, ask God to let you see other people—all other people—the way He sees them. When He does you will realize that God loves that guy who gets on your nerves every bit as much as He loves you. You'll understand that the one who rubs you the wrong way is a masterpiece in God's gallery—an original, a one of a kind, and one that deserves to be treated with absolute respect and dignity. You'll remember that Jesus thought enough of that person to die for him so that he might not perish but have everlasting life. Who are we to criticize and condemn those Jesus wants to redeem?

Every person has flaws and deficiencies. Every person, at one time or another, has been the victim of sin's curse and the slave of the evil one. There's not a one of us who is righteous in and of ourselves. There is no one who deserves any credit for saving himself. We are all sinners with *one* hope—the grace of God.

So let's bear with one another. We're all in the process of becoming conformed to the image of Christ. We need to be patient with those who are struggling, or stuck, or who don't seem to be progressing very much. We don't know what's going on in their hearts. We don't know all the facts and circumstances and factors that might be causing them to struggle. Only God does. We need to entrust them to Him. We need to pray for them. And we need to be instruments of His grace.

Finally, if you want to overcome the tendency to be judgmental, believe the best about others; give the benefit of the doubt. Instead of carelessly jumping to conclusions or hastily making assumptions that end up putting someone in a negative light, we need to pause, ask questions, and do our due diligence to make sure we get the story straight. That's a key component of love. Paul told us in 1 Corinthians 13 that "love believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things" (13:7).

That definition of love is just the opposite of being judgmental. And the way to have that love is by asking the Holy Spirit to fill you, because it is God's love, and when you are under the influence of the Spirit you *will* express that love.

By the way, just as there is a boomerang effect with careless, critical, and condemning words, so there is a boomerang effect with kind and loving words. Grace begets grace, resulting in joy and peace and salvation. Everything we are and have and hope for is because of God's grace, so let's be gracious to others.

The Boomerang Effect Matthew 7:1-5

Main Idea: Those who use their words as weapons will themselves be wounded

The command: “Do not judge...” (1a)

The consequence: “...or you will be judged” (1b)

The manner of judgment (2)
What goes around comes around

The measure you use
Justice or mercy?

Getting justice from God

The absurdity of judgmental people (3-5)
Experts on specks in others' eyes

Oblivious to the log in their own

Application: If you have a problem judging others and want to overcome you must:

- _____ it as sin and _____
- live each day in the _____ of the cross
- ask God to let you _____ others as He _____ them

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

“The Boomerang Effect” Matthew 7:1-5

Main Idea: Those who use their words as weapons will themselves be wounded.

1) Typically, being judgmental (having a critical, condemning spirit) is the result of pride, presumption, jealousy, unforgiveness, or insecurity. Do you have a problem being judgmental? Can you, with the Holy Spirit’s assistance, determine why?

How can you deal with the root of this issue?

2) Can you think of a time when you experienced the “boomerang effect?” What happened? How did you deal with it?

3) How do we become “gracious” people?