

A JUDGMENT CALL MATTHEW 7:6

I'm guessing most of us have had conversations with people who are not just *opposed* to Jesus and the gospel; they are hostile. They're not just disinterested in Jesus and the gospel; they are determined to trash His name and His message. What makes these conversations even more difficult is that some of these people are loved ones—family members or friends that we care about deeply and who we desperately want to have eternal life.

How do you relate to such people? Do you continue to engage them in conversations about spiritual things, or do you take a different course of action? It's a very practical question, and Jesus provides an answer in **Matthew 7:6**. *“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”*

You might read this little proverb and wonder if this is the same Jesus who just got through telling His audience, *“Do not judge.”* He sounds rather judgmental here. He is certainly making a judgment as He compares people to dogs and pigs. What does Jesus mean in verse 6, and how does this fit into the context of not judging others?

In the first five verses of Matthew 7 Jesus warns against having a critical and condemning spirit. In *all* of our relationships, even with those people who push our buttons and rub us the wrong way, we are to express the mercy and grace of God. After all, there was nothing about any of us that endeared *us* to God. We are by nature His enemies—sinful, rebellious, and self-centered. Yet, because of His great *love* for us, God, who is rich in *mercy*, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins (Eph. 2:4-5). He didn't treat us as our sins deserve, in which case we'd all be in hell. Instead, He exercised mercy.

And He asks us to do the same with others.

It is wrong to have a critical, condemning spirit because every person is precious to God. Every person has been created *by* God *in* His image and is the object of His love. He loves every person so much that He sent His Son Jesus to die for all of us.

But that is not to say that we are never to make judgments. We are told in many passages of Scripture that we must distinguish between truth and error, right and wrong, good and evil. That's where verse 6 fits in. While verses 1-5 warn us against being judgmental, verse 6 tells us that there are times when we need to be discerning. We are to tolerate the differences in our brothers and sisters who may offend us, but we are not to coddle those who are rebellious or hostile.

Look at the text again. **Verse 6**. *“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”*

Dogs in Palestine were not the cuddly pets that sit at their master's feet wagging their tails and waiting to have their ears scratched. They were certainly not man's best friend; they were man's enemy. Most dogs in Palestine were wild scavengers that loitered in the city dump. They were vicious, snarling creatures that roamed in savage packs and were often a menace to the community.

I got a better understanding of this when we stayed with Debbie Sardo in Sudan a few years ago. There were wild dogs everywhere, and none of them were ones that you would ever try to approach, let alone pet. On more than one occasion, while riding a motorcycle, I had to accelerate to keep them from biting my legs.

The phrase, “what is sacred” or “what is holy” is most probably a reference to the meat offered to God in the temple at Jerusalem. At the very center of the temple was a slaughterhouse. Jews would come with an animal and give it to the priests to sacrifice to show how serious they felt about their sins.

At the end of the day there was usually meat left over that had not been consumed, and the priests had to figure out what to do with it. They ate what they could, they gave what they could to the people, but they had to dispose of what was left in a way that would not desecrate the meat, because it had been consecrated to the Lord, and was therefore sacred.

Of course, they didn’t have refrigeration, and they didn’t want to just throw it on the garbage heap because wild dogs would spend the night ripping it apart and devouring it.

I feel that way about my old Bibles. When I wear one out I don’t feel right about tossing it in the trash can and letting it come into contact with coffee grinds and melon rinds and banana peels. I can’t really give them away because they’re marked and torn and tattered. So they occupy a shelf in my office where they just sit, and where I suspect they will sit for some time.

The point is, something that is sacred is not to be treated flippantly or disrespectfully. When Jesus said, “*Do not give dogs what is sacred,*” He was saying that dogs and sacred things are incompatible. A dog doesn’t know if something is sacred or not; neither does it care. Therefore, it will treat it like everything else, so that what is sacred becomes profaned when it comes into contact with it.

Jesus goes on in the second part of **verse 6b**. “*...Do not throw your pearls to pigs.*”

The metaphor of a pig is even more alarming than a dog. Pigs were an abomination to Jews. They were the epitome of uncleanness, so that Jews would never touch a pig, let alone try to domesticate one. Therefore, in Palestine pigs were largely wild creatures, similar to a wild boar, with sharp tusks and hooves. They, too, inhabited the city dump where they spent the days foraging for food scraps amidst the rubbish.

Of course, no one in his/her right mind would throw pearls to pigs. But if you did, you wouldn’t get a very good reaction. All pigs can appreciate is something to fill their bellies. A pearl has absolutely no value to a pig. In fact, if you were to sprinkle a few of them in front of their noses they may try to eat them, and when they discovered they were inedible, they would spit them out and then try to bite the hand that fed them. Pigs don’t take kindly to pearls or the people who give them, no matter how well-intentioned the pearl giver is.

When you go to Yellowstone Park there are signs posted that prohibit feeding bears. That’s because bears are not usually satisfied with a corner of a sandwich or half a cookie. And if you don’t feed them what satisfies them they may turn on *you* and seek nourishment from your forearm. It’s the nature of bears.

Once we were staying at a resort on the coast of East Africa where wild monkeys roamed the grounds. I never did trust those monkeys. They had a sinister look in their eyes that made me wary and uncomfortable. And so I gave our kids strict instructions not to play with them, much to their dismay.

One day we were by the poolside and saw a young girl sitting in the balcony of her room invite a monkey to share her meal. The monkey readily accepted. She gave him a few pieces of a sandwich that he devoured, and then she put a piece in her own mouth. At that the monkey slapped her face, took the piece out of her mouth and ate it himself.

Obviously her intentions were noble. She was being kind and gracious. But she was naïve. You don’t sit down and have lunch with wild monkeys, hoping to strike up a friendship,

because they couldn't care less about you. They are only out to get something for themselves. Such is the nature of monkeys.

Likewise, wild pigs are not interested in striking up friendships with those who have food. So when you're dealing with wild pigs as with monkeys and bears, it's probably not a good idea to feed them at all. One thing is sure: Don't give them pearls. You'll not only be wasting something that is precious, you will enrage them, because they are incapable of appreciating them.

So what is Jesus saying here? You know He's not giving us a lesson in zoology (the study of animals). He's giving us a lesson in anthropology (the study of man). He's saying that some people have characteristics that resemble certain animals. Knowing those characteristics can help you discern how to relate to them.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus frequently compared people to animals? He called the Pharisees 'a brood of vipers,' Herod 'a fox,' and false teachers 'ferocious wolves.' These people had characteristics that reminded Him of these animals, and if anyone could make that comparison it was Jesus, since He created the animals.

There are some people who remind Jesus of snarling dogs and vicious pigs. In other words, they are predators and scavengers who care about nothing but satiating their own appetites. They show contempt for sacred things and are hostile when they are offered that which is precious.

So how do we apply this principle?

The first question we need to answer is: "What are the *sacred* and *precious* things in this verse?" As always, it is best to try to discern that in the context.

Remember, Jesus has been talking about our relationships with others, especially those relationships where there are things about other persons that tempt you to react negatively. There are people in all of our lives with whom we are incompatible—people who get on our nerves and under our skin, believers and unbelievers alike.

But as children of God we must still have relationships with such people. Jesus tells us that when we relate to such people we must do so constructively, not destructively. We destroy or damage relationships when we judge—when we make assumptions or jump to conclusions; when we point out their flaws, or condemn them for their deficiencies.

And we are being especially destructive (not to mention ridiculous) when we point out the minor faults of our brothers and sisters when we ourselves have major issues in our own lives. Jesus says, **verses 3-4.** 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?*

But when we *do* see a speck in someone else's eye it is neither loving nor helpful to just ignore it. And so Jesus says, **verse 5.** 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.*

A splinter is a relatively minor irritation, but it is irritating nonetheless, and it still hurts. It is not in our brother's best interest to stand by and let him suffer with it if it is in our power to help extract it. In fact, we ought to feel a sense of obligation to help our brother out.

What this means is this: When a person has a problem or issue that needs to be attended to we can do him a great service by offering to assist him. We can love him, encourage him, or exhort him in a loving way. We can proclaim the powerful words of Scripture; we can pray for her, serve her, share our resources with her. These are sacred and precious things. If we do these things in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit, they

are ways in which God Himself ministers to those in need.

But in verse 6 Jesus says that not everyone is open or receptive to that kind of help, and not everyone is capable of receiving it. In that case you may want to think twice before you give it, or it may backfire. And I believe the kind of people He is referring to here—what He identifies as “dogs” and “pigs”— are people whose hearts are hard or callused, and therefore unreceptive and impenetrable.

This kind of hard-heartedness may be seen in people who blatantly despise the Lord and His Word, but it may also be seen in people who claim to know the Lord and His Word but who distort that knowledge for self-serving ends. In either case, what characterizes *dogs* and *pigs* is that when they are confronted with the truth they cannot “hear” it. They get defensive or they attack those who speak the truth, even if that truth is shared in a constructive or gentle way. Even if that truth is exactly what they need.

That attack may come in the form of sarcasm, ridicule, or outright hostility. But it is an attack that is meant to wound the person who is trying to help.

Jesus is saying that it is better not to try to help such people. Some people’s hearts are so hard that they are not receptive to the help they need, so it may be best not to try to help them. Again, your words might be sacred words—words of life and liberty and healing, but if their hearts are hard then it’s sometimes better to keep your mouth shut, because they are incapable of hearing them.

I am struck, when I read the gospels, by the fact that Jesus didn’t tell everyone He met what was wrong with them or what they needed to do to get better or how they could solve their problems. He had encounters with some people whose faults and sins were obvious, and yet He often did *not* address them.

He did not say to Judas, for example, “You know, Judas, if you would only remember this, if you would only believe, you’d be set free from your bondage and have a blessed life.” Jesus certainly knew exactly what Judas needed. But Judas was hard-hearted, and Jesus will never force His way into someone’s heart.

What is more, Jesus intentionally spoke in parables, one of the purposes of which was to conceal truth. It is apparent that as He told these ordinary stories, many people were perplexed, wondering what they meant. Those who were truly receptive to the truth would use their imaginations to ponder the profound meaning, while those who were not receptive would walk away saying, “I don’t get it. Why does everyone think this guy is so great? All He does is tell stories.”

And do you remember when Jesus was sent to Herod as part of His trial just prior to His crucifixion? The text says that when Herod saw Jesus he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he’d wanted to see Him. From what he’d heard, he hoped to see Him perform some miracle. Luke says, “Herod plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answers.”

I read these things and I want to say, “Lord, speak! Explain! Convince! If anyone can make the truth clear it’s you!”

But Jesus saw something that we cannot always see. He saw the heart of man. He knew the nature of those with whom He was relating. He knew those who did not have “ears to hear” or “eyes to see”. He knew those who would profane the sacred and despise the precious. And so He simply did not give them opportunity.

You may be thinking. “Okay. But that’s Jesus. He’s the Son of God. He can see into hearts and read minds and know how people will respond. But what about us? How do we

know who will be receptive and who will not?”

That’s a good question. The fact is we don’t know, and so it requires discernment. We certainly must not jump to conclusions or make assumptions or we may miss opportunities that the Lord gives us. We must ask the Lord to give us wisdom. We must ask Him to fill us with His Spirit and enable us to have the mind of Christ.

We are told in Proverbs that there are those who simply will not “hear” wisdom. They are called *fools* and *scoffers* and *mockers*. They react defensively or aggressively to words of correction or reproof. In one section Solomon says, “*Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you*” (9:7-8).

A few years ago the late All Pro Lineman Reggie White from the Green Bay Packers was asked to address the Wisconsin State Congress. As a Christian, White took this as an opportunity to share his convictions and concerns about the declining morality of our country. During the course of his message he called homosexuality a sin. It made every national prime time news program in the country that night, and caused an uproar throughout the country. Shortly after I read an article in a sports magazine that called him a “brainless bigot.”

I don’t know what the Spirit of God wanted Reggie White to say when he was talking to these people, many of whom are self-professed antagonists of the faith. Certainly, there have been times when God used a message given to “dogs” and “pigs” to accomplish His purpose—after all, God is in the business of changing dogs and pigs into sheep.

It requires wisdom and discernment. It requires keeping in step with the Spirit. If God wants you to be quiet like Jesus sometimes was, then be quiet. If God wants to use you to be the catalyst for transformation—even in hostile circumstances—then speak up, and proclaim the gospel with boldness.

That’s what Stephen did in Acts 7. He had as hostile an audience as one will ever have—so hostile that, after proclaiming the gospel to them, they stoned him to death.

But we are told that he was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. In other words, he was prompted and led and controlled by the Spirit. And one of the snarling dogs and vicious pigs in that hostile crowd was a man whom God turned into a loving son and a humble servant. God changed his nature, clothed him in his righteousness, and made him probably the most influential Christian the world has ever known.

God only knows how many “Pauls” are presently pigs. We don’t. We need to be led by the Spirit as Stephen was. But it’s one thing to proclaim the truth. It’s another to try to cram it down someone’s throat.

That’s why I wonder if *debating* with a person about the truth of the gospel is really a constructive endeavor. You may win the debate, but has the truth really penetrated your opponent’s heart?

That’s why I wonder how profitable it is to protest outside an abortion clinic. Angry words are not the way to change a heart. When people are spiritually lost and spiritually blind and spiritually enslaved we must realize that our emotionally laden outbursts and protests, our attempts at persuasion, have very little affect, except to alienate us further from those people.

We cannot change a person’s nature. We cannot turn a snarling dog or a vicious pig into a son or daughter of God. Only God can do that. And we ought to pray earnestly that He does.

Pastor Stan Myers
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I know some people in this room who used to be snarling dogs and vicious pigs. Antagonistic to the gospel, hostile to Jesus, and contemptuous of His church. But God answered the earnest prayers of their loved ones. He opened their closed minds and softened their hard hearts so they could hear the life-giving, liberating truth about Jesus, and become born again.

That's what God can do.

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MAIN IDEA: SOME PEOPLE'S HEARTS ARE SO HARD THAT THEY ARE NOT RECEPTIVE TO THE HELP THEY NEED, SO IT MAY BE BEST NOT TO TRY TO HELP THEM.

"DO NOT JUDGE" (REVIEW OF VERSES 1-5)

SNARLING DOGS AND VICIOUS PIGS

SACRED THINGS AND PRECIOUS THINGS

TO HELP OR NOT TO HELP?
HARDENED OR CALLUSED AND, THUS, UNRECEPTIVE

LEARNING FROM JESUS' EXAMPLE

RELYING ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

“A Judgment Call”

Matthew 7:6

Sacred things and pearls represent the help or encouragement people need to receive life, liberty, or healing. Snarling dogs and vicious pigs represent people whose hearts are so hard that they are not receptive to this help.

Do you know any people who might be comparable to “dogs” or “pigs”? What makes you think so?

How would God have you relate to them?

How can you help them, even in their hardened state?