TO JUDGE OR NOT TO JUDGE?

1. Introduction

a. Seeking to walk out the kingdom lifestyle as described in Matthew 5-6 creates challenges that can change our relationships with people – even friends. Some changes will be positive as we choose to live out the kingdom lifestyle together but others may become negative as our radical pursuit of a kingdom lifestyle challenges or alienates other. Some draw back from their wholehearted pursuit of God out of fear of being judged or criticized.

b. We need to avoid being hindered by the spirit of judgment, in our pursuit of the 8 Beatitudes. This occurs in two ways: first, by judging others who pursue God with less intensity than us (7:1-5) and second, by being judged by others who are against or challenged by the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle (Mt. 7:6). We are tempted by both situations, even in close relationships, and we must respond rightly.

Matt. 7:1-6 *"Judge not, that you be not judged. [2] For with the judgement you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. [3] 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? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye', when there is the log in your own eye? [5] You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

[6] "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.

c. Jesus taught us how to evaluate and respond to those with values that differ from us (Mt. 7:1-20). In Matthew 7:1-6, He highlighted two types of people that we may differ from—brothers who are close enough that we can take the speck from their eye (7:3-5) and those who oppose us (7:6).

d. To judge means to evaluate so as to approve or correct in seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt. 6:33). Some misinterpret this passage to say that we must never point out anything or any person that is wrong. They believe that we are to avoid all judgment (evaluation). Jesus called us to avoid judgment without going through the right process, with the right information, and in the right spirit. In this very context, Jesus called us to remove the speck from a brother (v. 5), and recognize "dogs and pigs" (v. 6) and false prophets (v. 15).

John 7:24 *Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement.*

e. This is all about judging in the right spirit not about not judging at all. We are not to be critical of others who seem to pursue God with less intensity or clarity (7:1-5). With the standard of judgment that we use on others, we will receive it from God and man (Mt. 7:2) This reminds me of Kirk's instruction to us to not criticise or get angry with others for not having revelation that we ourselves couldn't see the day before we saw it.

2. Responding to faults in others

a. Jesus taught us how to respond to faults in others—especially in those close to us (Mt. 7:3-5).

Judge not, that you be not judged. [2] For with the judgement you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. [3] 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? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye', when there is

the log in your own eye? [5] *You hypocrite**, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.***

b. **Look at the speck:** We must not look at a speck in our brother's eye without focusing on the plank (or bigger problem) in our eye. To look at a speck in our brother's eyes means to focus on a small area in their life that blurs their ability to see and thus act rightly. We lack the full information about our brother's life that results in the speck being in his eye.

c. **Consider the plank:** To consider a plank in our eye is to think long and deep about the larger areas in our life that blur our ability to see and thus act rightly. These large areas include our pride, selfish motives, and compromises that are often unknown to others. We have much more information about our heart (we do not act on) than our brother's.

d. **Hypocrite:** Jesus pointed out the lack of sincerity for godliness that has zeal to address a small area in a brother's life whilst failing to address the larger issues in our life.

e. **First:** We are to first take time to address the plank or bigger area in our life. This will give us insight, tenderness, and sensitivity to help remove a speck from our brother's eye. Embracing the long and detailed process of settling large issues in our life provides us with the ability to see clearly to help our brother far more effectively and with patience.

f. It's not wrong to lovingly help our brother remove a harmful speck from his eye. It's wrong to self-righteously point out a speck in our brother's eye when we ignore, as no big deal, the ridiculous log protruding from our own.

g. Jesus takes judgment very seriously. He is the righteous judge (2 Tim.4:8), who is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). He does not judge by appearances, but judges with right judgment (John 7:24). Every judgment he pronounces issues from his core loving nature (1 John 4:8).

2 Timothy 4:8 *Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

1 John 4:7-8 *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.* [8] *Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love*

h. Therefore, when we judge, and Scripture instructs Christians to judge at times, we must take great care that our judgment, like Christ's, is always charitable.

1 Corinthians 5:12 *For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?*

3. Pearls before swine

a. Jesus exhorted us not to give advice about truth to those who are unreceptive.

[6] *"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.*

b. We do not force-feed the truth to people. There is a time to move on as Paul did (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 19:9).

c. **Pearls** are the truths that are both holy and very valuable. **Dogs and swine** are those people who do not value holy things (pearls). Initially, they will trample on the truths (pearls) and eventually turn

on you and seek to tear your reputation and/or your life to pieces. Pigs trample and wild dogs (scavengers) tear apart.

d. Dogs and pigs stood for pagan Gentiles to Jewish people. Dogs persecuted the righteous (Ps. 22:16). However, in the early church they speak of hostile "non-disciples" and false believers (Mt. 5:47; 6:7, 32; 18:17; Lk. 12:30; Phil. 3:2; 2 Pet. 2:22; Rev. 22:15).

4. The biblical command to judge

a. We do not sacrifice truth for love, but we express them together. Truth empowers real love. Many have wrong views of what the Scripture means when calling us to judge one another in a way that gives people the opportunity for deliverance. It is Christ-like to judge. It is parallel to a doctor "judging" cancer while there is time to treat it. It is an expression of God's mercy.

Eph. 4:15 *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*

b. We are commanded to make loving, righteous judgments in a world that greatly values tolerance. This will dramatically change the social dynamics in a church. Any church that refuses to judge according to biblical standards will come under judgment. The natural by-product of neglecting righteous judgment is a steady increase of compromise in its leaders, members, and families.

c. Jesus commended those who spoke out against ministries who promoted falsehood and impurity. Paul exposed false teachers instead of allowing them to minister in the body (2 Cor. 11:12-13).

Rev. 2:2 *You tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.*

Rev. 2:20 *I have a few things against you, because you allow [tolerate]…Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality…*

d. Paul brought judgment on those who refused to repent of immorality to keep them from greater spiritual harm (1 Cor. 5:5) and he commanded separation from the unrepentant (2 Thes. 3:6-14).

1 Cor. 5:1-3 *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. [2] And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.[3] For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgement on the one who did such a thing.*

e. In the Church today, there is radical individualism and the privatisation of faith. However, anyone who confesses love for Jesus and is a part of His covenant community (Church) is required to live by kingdom standards of conduct that are commanded in the Scripture. Individual believers are not free to choose any lifestyle they want with the assurance of not being "judged".

Mt. 18:15 *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother*

f. We first go to our brother in private to seek to win them back to a right relationship with Jesus, not to show ourselves as superior or get back at them. When we meet face to face we feel differently. The Spirit intervenes and we often feel more affection and mercy than when talking about him to others.

5. Judging in the right way

a. We judge in the right way, which includes **the right process, right information, and right spirit**. We seek to restore people by judging in the right way which requires wisdom from the Spirit to

recognise the real issues, to invest the necessary time, to search our own hearts, and to stand courageously for our brother as we seek his restoration.

i **Humbly:** We look to ourselves as we approach others with the sense of humility and mourning over our personal failures. We consider the plank in our own eye. We often discover much about our heart and weakness in the process of preparing to appeal to our brother.

ii **Accurately:** We take time and effort to get all the available information. Those who are content with partial information have already made up their minds against another.

Prov.18:13,17 *If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame…. The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.*

James 1:19 *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;*

iii **Gently:** We approach our brothers tenderly without harshness hoping for the best in the process. We make appeals to restore with gentleness as we consider our own weakness. We look for their sincere intention to obey Jesus as they declare war on their recent failures. A gentle response diffuses anger in the one you speak to; a harsh tone will stir anger up. Mercy received transforms a person faster than judgment.

Gal.6:1 *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

Prov.15:1 *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

James 1:13 *Mercy triumphs over judgement.*

iv **Patiently:** We give people time to understand the gravity of their sin and time to repent without quickly concluding that they refuse to repent. We must not rush through the process too quickly.

Rev. 2:21 *I gave her [Jezebel] time to repent of her sexual immorality…*

v **Confidentiality:** We only make the information known to those with authority to help in the restoration process. We do not reveal the past sins of anyone who repents. The leaders are required to be strictly confidential (unless bringing in leaders over them to help).

Prov. 11:13 *A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.*

Prov. 17:9 *He who <u>covers a transgression seeks love</u>, but he who <u>repeats</u> a matter separates friends.*

b. How we judge others says far more about us than how we are judged by others. This is why God will judge us in the manner we judge others, not in the manner they judge us. Therefore, we must judge with right judgment (John 7:24). And right judgment is charitably quick to believe innocence, charitably slow to pronounce guilt, charitably redemptive when it must be, and charitably silent if at all possible. And when in doubt, "judge not."

c. To judge requires great spiritual discernment which first requires that we seek such discernment in our own lives. To fail to do so will mean that we are not equipped to help one another to mature in Christ.

1 Thess.5:23-24 *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24] He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*