

## To Sit in Judgement

*“...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. 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.*

*Matthew 7:1-5*

Like gossip we as humans love to pass judgement over others. There is something which just attracts us to pointing out other people’s faults and sinful behaviour. Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone misjudging you? Have you been guilty of misjudging someone else based on what you have heard or seen? Have you ever avoided or excluded someone after judging them negatively? All of us would likely answer ‘yes’ to all three questions. So, the topic of judging which Jesus addresses is a very applicable and real lesson for us to engage with.

What strikes me is that Jesus doesn’t completely prohibit judging (even though it may appear that way in verse 1). I like the way that one author (Sam Storms, ‘Tough Topics’) put it, *“The command to judge not is not a requirement to be blind, but rather a plea to be generous.”* This generosity is to give people the benefit of the doubt, to attempt to get to know the full picture and not jumping to conclusions, to be patient and kind in our dealings with people. Do you jump to conclusions about people quickly? Do you need to be a bit more generous? If we are not prohibited from judging then how are we to judge correctly? Perhaps this story can help:

*Recently a young couple had moved into a small neighbourhood. Living next door was Bill and Mary. One morning, while eating breakfast, Mary looked out the window and watched her new young neighbour hanging up her washing. “That washing isn’t very clean,” Mary told Bill. “Our young neighbour doesn’t know how to get her clothes clean.” Bill read his paper and didn’t say a word. Every time her new neighbour hung her laundry out to dry, Mary would make the same comments. Bill continued to say nothing. A few weeks later... Mary was surprised to look out her window and see a nice, fresh and clean row of clothes hung out to dry. In surprise she said to her husband, “Look Bill, she finally knows how to clean her washing.” “I wonder what she learned?” Mary said. Bill replied, “I might have an answer for you.” “Really?” Mary asked. “Yes, I got up early this morning and washed our windows...I guess we finally learnt how to wash our windows.”*

More often than not we have “dirty windows” which we look through. Jesus uses a rather humorous hyperbole to illustrate that we should be careful to look at our own life before jumping to conclusions and judging others. He makes it clear that we must first see clearly to judge another correctly. What dirt on your window do you need to clean? What plank do you need to remove?

We can attempt to see clearly by looking inward and examining our motivations and own faults or shortcomings. We must be careful that our judging does not exclude people from the church and God’s love; that we do not judge from thinking we are superior to another person; that we are not in fact guilty of the same fault or worse. If we are able to see clearly then perhaps we will be better able to put ourselves in the shoes of others and be able to judge with clarity. *Long ago Hillel the famous Rabbi said, “Do not judge a man until you yourself have come into his circumstances or situation.” No man knows the strength of another man's temptations (Daily Study Bible, Karl Barth).*