***No 14 Judging others Matthew 7:1 to 6***

Surely sometimes we have to judge another human being. We have to evaluate someone at work. If a workman produces shoddy work, we have to say the job is unsatisfactory. Teachers must make judgements about the performance of their students. Last week we saw that one Greek word was used to describe ‘worry’ (bad) and ‘concern’ (good) so we must be clear what judging someone really means.

What is being judged is never stated so we must take these words as a broad principle. The word is used in several ways in the scriptures.

* Discernment or evaluation (Luke 7:43)
* In a legal context (Matt 5:40)
* The giving of a reward (Matt 19:28)
* A statement of guilt about another person (John 7:51)
* To determine someone’s fate (Matt 5:22 & 8:16)

From the context, Jesus is talking about the last two in the list. He is not criticising the making of sound judgements or that judgements in a court need to be made.

1. Talk around the group about times you have made judgements about other people?

Have they ever been justified?

Have they ever been unfair?

How good are you at saying you were wrong?

It is clear we should be careful because Jesus says you will be judged in a similar way to your own criticism. It is the opposite to the beatitude in Matthew 5:7 which says ‘Blessed are the merciful for they we will obtain mercy’. And again we see the principle in the Lord’s Prayer – ‘Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors’.

1. Do we ever have the right to say the final word about the guilt of another person?

Is your opinion ever the complete and only view of another person’s wrongdoing?

Does the fact that we may not have the total story encourage restraint in expressing our judgement?

The warning continues with Jesus saying ‘ … and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you’. In other words, God’s judgement of you will parallel what you have given out. If our desire is to please God, we do not want to be judged by him. This is not about God’s final judgement of whether we are saved by grace or not. It reminds us that God is aware of our daily conduct and that our everyday speech and actions should reflect our faith in Christ.

1. Would the fact that you will be judged if you judge others, change the way we relate to family, friends or work colleagues?

How can we restrain our critical spirit when it comes to the surface?

Is it about think/pray before you speak?

Maybe it’s to pray for a spirit of humility because you may not have the complete picture of the person you are judging.

The illustration Jesus uses could be a personal one from Joseph’s carpentry bench.(13:55) It is another example of intentional exaggeration to make a point. The contrast is between the insignificance of the problem of the accused and the character of the accuser. The accuser cannot help anyone because he has a huge piece of wood obscuring his vision.

1. When we watch the news, we hear a lot of people criticising the actions and behaviour of another. Is it too easy to pick this up so that our first move is to be critical?

If our dynamic is always to love one another, when is judgement of another believer valid?

The real problem is addressed in verse 5, where accusers are called ‘hypocrites’. In the original Greek this is a personal accusation implying that Jesus has seen this in the lives of his own followers – namely, us. Hypocrisy means to look righteous on the outside to mask the less than perfect inner self. Don’t attend to the speck in your brother’s eye, when you have a big plank sticking out of your head. The hypocrite thinks he can see clearly but his eyes are blocked so he cannot see his own self-righteous attitude.

1. How can we guard against this kind of hypocrisy?

Should we speak less about other people?

Should we take more time to get a clearer picture before we comment?

To give another side of this picture, Jesus balances his words about judging with words about being wise and discerning. This is not a downer on dogs but in the ancient world dogs lived in squalor not in 5-star kennels. To refer to a person as a dog was a serious insult. Pigs were rejected by Jewish people – they never ate pork. These animals typify those who have rejected the message of the kingdom. It is a warning against proclaiming the kingdom to those who will only ridicule or worse.

1. Just as we should not judge people, we should also be wise about who we try to communicate with. Does this mean there are some people who are unlikely to respond to the gospel?

How do we know which is the right person to talk to?

***Perhaps this is a good time to pray that we are less quick to judge and more likely to love.***