

# Evotional

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> April 2008 (pm).

**Speakers:** Neil Durling.

**Message title:** “The Church is judgemental and negative.”



**Bible passage:** Matthew 7:1-6 & 18:15-20: *Too long for this page.*

## **The message in brief:**

We can all have a tendency to be judgemental and negative. Sadly negative experiences turn many people away from the Church who might be interested in Jesus. It seems Jesus must have known this would be a problem for his people, and gives helpful advice on how to act in a Christian manner when we want to judge others in a negative way.

### **In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about judging (7:1-6):**

He tells us not to judge (1) which Paul supports (Romans 14:13). Jesus is talking about judgmentalism which is fault finding and censorious. In Jesus' culture this showed itself through stereotyping (e.g.: “he eats with tax collectors and sinners”) and putting people in boxes – I'm glad we've got past that!

Jesus then says that when we judge, we will be judged in the same way (2). He seems to say that we *will* judge which is supported by the following verses; Jesus points out *when* we can judge others. Paul makes it clear that we can judge fellow Christians but are to leave the judgement of others to God (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

We should judge ourselves first before we judge our brothers – the disciples/Christians (3-5). We can only judge someone else if we can see properly. Therefore, we need to remove the “speck of sawdust” (lit. any bit of foreign matter) from our eye before removing the “plank” (lit. log) from another's. Jesus isn't saying we can't help each other remove the speck from our eyes, but that we should sort out our own shortcomings first.

Verse 6 is often not linked to the passage about judging, but it logically follows on - he is saying that we need to judge others in a helpful way. We should only judge them if it helps them, otherwise it is like giving dogs that which is sacred (In Matthew's gospel that is the kingdom) or giving pearls to pigs when they want left over food and mud instead! We can only see what will help them if we have removed the log from our own eye.

### **Jesus gives us guidance about how to judge each other as Christians (18:15-20):**

Go to your brother/sister and humbly confront and convict them to win them over (15).

If this doesn't work take one or two witnesses (16). This is the same as God's guidance for the people in Deuteronomy 19:15; the aim in that passage was to bring the discussion before the whole community. The witnesses were there not for the initial sin, but to see how the conversation went and report it to the people. Therefore, our witnesses are there to talk to the church. I like Jesus' realism here: If they won't repent one-to-one, they probably won't when others get involved - but bring the extras in, nevertheless, to see how both parties act, then they can bring their observations to the church as a whole.

If they refuse to change when they are brought before the church, Jesus tells us to treat them (lit. let him be to you as) like a tax collector or pagan (17). Is this harsh? Yes, if we are judgemental and negative, but if we are like Jesus does this phrase have a different meaning: How did Jesus treat tax collectors and pagans?

We live in a judgemental and negative culture and are called by Jesus to be salt and light in the midst of it (Matthew 5:13-16). When we act, there are cosmic consequences to our judging; things are “bound or loosed” in the heavens (18).

Jesus reminds us that where there is unity in our judging he is there (19-20). This passage about “two or three gathered in my name” isn't primarily about prayer. Within the context of the passage it is about becoming united again: Where you gather to sort something out, Jesus is there also.

**Question:** Where am I judgemental and negative?

**A prayer:** Father God, please help me to become less judgemental and negative. Amen.