For my entire life, it has been an annual family tradition to take a family vacation to the beach. And when my brother, Josh, and I were elementary age, one of the things we loved to do at the beach was build sandcastles. We would dig moats and build bridges and walls and towers. And we usually picked a spot where, even when the tide came in, it wouldn’t wipe out the castle. But we also wanted to be close enough to the water that our moat would fill up. The problem was, when the water started pouring into our moat, it would begin to eat away at the foundation of the castle. And pretty soon, pieces would start to break off and fall in the water. And Josh and I would always go into repair mode. We would try to patch the cracks and pack the sand back together and build the base back up. But I’ve got to tell you: It never worked. Once the foundation got too wet, the rest of the castle was done. The only solution was to scrap the whole thing, bring in bucket loads of dry sand, rebuild a bigger and drier foundation, and start over. Sometimes you have to tear things down before you can build them back up the right way.

And that is a perfect description of the situation surrounding our text today. We are in Matthew chapter 7. And Matthew 7 starts with one of the most well-known verses in the entire Sermon on the Mount. In fact, I’ve got a theory that not only is Matthew 7:1 the most well-known verse in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:1 very well may be the most frequently-quoted verse in the whole Bible. Now, I know some of you are thinking, “What about Psalm 23:1? ‘The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.’ Surely, that’s more well-known. Or 1 John 1:9, ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ Or Romans 3:23, ‘For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.’ Or especially John 3:16, ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.’ That’s got to be the most well-known verse in the Bible.” And maybe it is. But for just a minute, think about how often you hear people refer to Matthew 7:1, *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”* Our culture loves that verse. It’s the battle cry of our day. “Don’t judge me. You can’t judge me. Who are you to judge me?” It may be the most popular verse of our day.

Unfortunately, even if “Do not judge,” is the most frequently-quoted verse of our day, it’s also probably the most misinterpreted, misunderstood, ripped out of context, completely abused verse of our day. When most people quote this verse, what they mean is, “No one has any right to judge anyone else in any way ever. There is no absolute standard of right and wrong, so you can’t tell me what’s right and wrong for me, and I can’t tell you. You can’t judge or evaluate or criticize or correct what I’m doing. Don’t judge me.” Here’s the problem: That’s not even close to what Jesus means when He says, “Do not judge.” In fact, if we actually stop and look at how Jesus explains what He means by, “Do not judge,” you may be pretty shocked by what He says. So if we’re really going to understand Jesus’ teaching here, we’re going to have to tear some things down before we can build them back up the right way. We have to get rid of all the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of this verse, and then we’ll be able to build up an accurate understanding. So let’s read the first 6 verses of Matthew 7. Matthew 7:1-6. Jesus says, *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 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? 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. 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.”*

Now, like I said, people constantly quote, *“Do not judge,”* in our day. And usually, they mean that no one has any right to judge anyone else in any way at any time. That’s based on verses 1-2. Jesus says, *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*” The problem is, most people stop right there and totally ignore everything else Jesus says when He explains what He means. So look at verses 3-5 with me. Jesus says, *“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? 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.”*

Jesus says, “Here’s the type of judging that I don’t want you to do. I don’t want you to tell everybody else what to do and never do it yourself. I don’t want you to point out everybody else’s flaws but totally ignore your own. Don’t go picking sawdust out of people’s eyes when you’ve got an entire 2x4 in your own eye.”

But make sure you notice the cure that Jesus recommends. And actually, notice what Jesus doesn’t recommend. Jesus does not say, “Ignore the sawdust in your brother’s eye, because you shouldn’t judge people.” That’s not what He says. He says, “First, take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the sawdust from your brother’s eye.” So Jesus is not saying, “Don’t ever judge in any way.” He’s not saying, “Don’t remove the sawdust.” Jesus is saying, “You need to point out sawdust. You need to make the judgment that the sawdust shouldn’t be there. You even need to help your brother remove the sawdust…. But you need to subject yourself to the same treatment first.” It is right and good and appropriate to remove the sawdust from your brother’s eye… as long as you also remove the plank from your own eye. So Jesus is not saying, “Don’t ever judge.” He’s saying, “Don’t judge others while you completely ignore your own faults.” Don’t judge in a way that says, “I’m better than you. You’ve got all the problems, and I don’t.” Instead, judge in a way that says, “We’re all in this together, and we all care about each other. I’ve got junk that needs to come out of my eye. And you’ve got junk that needs to come out of your eye. And I need you to help me, because I want to help you, too.”

So according to verses 3-5, there are times when judgment is biblical and proper and actually commanded by Jesus. Jesus tells us that we *should* judge, as long as we do it the right way. And if that’s not quite enough to convince you, look at verse 6 with me. This verse is even more shocking. Jesus says, *“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.”*

What does Jesus mean here? Well, in Jesus’ day, dogs weren’t the lovable little family pets that we have today. They were wild animals. They were dirty, vicious scavengers that carried lots of diseases. And of course, pigs were unclean animals according to the Jewish law. The Jews wouldn’t eat a pig or touch a pig or have anything to do with a pig. So Jesus takes these two dirty animals – dogs and hogs – and He says, “Don’t give your sacred things to the dogs. And don’t give your pearls to the hogs.”

And the really important thing to realize is that Jesus isn’t talking about dogs and hogs here. He’s using them as an illustration for people. Jesus just said, “Take the sawdust out of your brother’s eye.” And now in the very next verse He’s saying, “But sometimes you’re going to encounter people who won’t let take the sawdust out of their eye. You’re going to encounter people who won’t let you help them. You’re going to encounter people who don’t appreciate the sacred and valuable truths of God’s Word. In fact, they will ridicule and slander and mock God’s Word. And when they do, you don’t keep throwing it to them over and over and over. You make the judgment that they aren’t willing to receive it, and you move on.” You have to be able to judge and discern the difference between a brother who is willing to receive correction and the dogs and hogs who aren’t.

Now, please don’t misunderstand me here. Don’t hear what I’m not saying. I’m not saying we don’t have to share the gospel with people. We are to share the gospel with everyone. And we are to be gracious and patient and persistent. But Jesus also says, “If people are so opposed and hard-hearted that they act like dogs and hogs and trample the gospel underfoot, then you need to judge their behavior as unworthy of any more time and move on to other people who are more open to the gospel.” That’s exactly what Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew 10:14. He sends them out to preach the good news of the kingdom, and He tells them, *“If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.”* We see Paul do the same thing in Acts 18:6. He went to the synagogue in Corinth to share the gospel with the Jews, but they rejected it. So Paul shook out his clothes and said, *“Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*

And I know this teaching is hard for us. It almost sounds wrong when we hear it. But that’s because our culture has taken us so far in the direction of never making a judgment about anything. And it’s important for us to see that in the exact same passage where Jesus says, “Do not judge,” He also explains that there are going to be times where we have to make some very hard judgments about people. There are times when judgment is biblical and proper and even commanded by Jesus.

And just for good measure, glance on down to verses 15-20 in Matthew 7. Jesus warns about false prophets in these verses. He says that a bad tree will bear bad fruit and a good tree will bear good fruit. And then in verse 20 He says, *“Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”* We never connect this back to verse 1, but we need to realize what Jesus implies here: He implies that we’re *supposed* to judge their fruit. We have to judge their fruit in order to determine whether or not they’re a false prophet. So once again, there’s a sense in which judgment is biblical and proper and even commanded by Jesus.

On top of that, there are all sorts of other places in the Bible where we’re commanded to judge. In Matthew 18:17, Jesus tells us to judge anyone in the church who refuses to repent of sin. In 1 Corinthians 5:12, Paul says we’re to judge those inside the church for the purpose of church discipline. In 1 Corinthians 6:5, he says we’re to judge a dispute between believers. In Titus 3:10, we’re to judge divisive people and have nothing to do with them. In 2 John 10, we’re to judge the doctrine of everyone who teaches in the church. So clearly and overwhelmingly, there is a sense in which judgment is biblical and proper and commanded.

Whatever Jesus means when He says, “Do not judge,” He does not mean what most people today act like He means. He does not mean, “Never judge anyone in any way at any time.” There are just too many examples where the Bible tells us to judge. So we have to tear down this unbiblical view that says, “Never judge anyone in any way.” That’s not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that there are times and ways in which it’s right to judge.

Now, with that said, the Bible also teaches that there are times and ways in which it’s wrong to judge. Remember, Jesus does say, “Do not judge.” So, if we’re going to build up a biblical understanding about judgment, the question we have to ask is, “How do we know the difference?” When is it biblical to judge and when is it unbiblical to judge?

And in the rest of our time together, we’re going to look at three balanced truths that help us avoid the wrong way to judge and help us practice the right way to judge.

The first truth is do not judge harshly. Instead, judge humbly. Look at verses 1-2 again. Jesus says, *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

Jesus is warning us that we will be judged in the same way that we judge others. In a lot of ways, it reminds me of building sandcastles with my brother again. Inevitably, at some point in the construction process, one of us would decide it was a good idea to throw sand at the other one. And, of course, the other would retaliate. And pretty soon, we would be in an all-out sand fight. Eventually, one of us would get sand in our eye or in our mouth, and we would go whining to Mom and Dad. And 9 times out of 10, Mom and Dad would give us that great Mom and Dad response, “Don’t dish it out if you can’t take it.” That’s sort of what Jesus is saying here. Be careful not to dish out judgment that you won’t be able to take yourself. If you pass down harsh, merciless condemnation on others, you better be ready to receive harsh, merciless condemnation, as well. You see, when you judge others harshly, that reveals your own arrogance and self-righteousness. And if there’s anything that God judges harshly, it’s arrogance and self-righteousness. So, if you judge harshly, God will judge you harshly because of your arrogance and self-righteousness. So do not judge harshly.

Instead, judge humbly. Think about verses 3-5. Jesus says, *“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? 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.”* Jesus says, “Any time you see some sawdust in your brother’s eye, you need to be humble enough to realize that you’ve probably got a 2x4 in your own eye. And as you’re judging them, keep in mind that you’ll be judged in the same way.” So if you would prefer to receive grace, make sure you show grace. If you would prefer to receive mercy, make sure you show mercy. If you would prefer to receive the benefit of the doubt, make sure you give others the benefit of the doubt. Be humble enough to recognize your need for grace, and then show that same grace to others as you confront them about the problems in their life.

As Paul says in Galatians 6:1, *“If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”* The word “gently” can also be translated meekly or humbly. Paul is saying, “Yes, confront them when they’re in sin. Judge them. But be gentle. Humbly recognize that that could just as easily be you.” (But by the grace of God go I.) So be as gentle with them as you would want them to be with you. Don’t judge harshly. Judge humbly.

The second balanced truth is do not judge hypocritically. Instead, judge honestly. Look at verses 3-5 again. Jesus says, *“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? 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.”*

We’ve already talked about this a little bit. Jesus is taking issue with people who don’t practice what they preach. These are people who are always telling everybody else what to do, but they don’t ever actually do it themselves. They judge everybody else’s flaws and ignore their own. They point out other people’s sawdust even though they have an entire 2x4 in their own eye. And Jesus uses one word to describe them: hypocrites.

If you judge others, but ignore your own sins, you’re a hypocrite. And I really don’t believe we ever intend to be hypocrites. I think, a lot of times, we don’t even realize we’re doing it. Let me explain what I mean. What usually happens is that the sins that we so vocally condemn in other people take a slightly different expression in our own life. It’s still the same sin, but it’s packaged in a different way so that we don’t recognize it. For example, we affirm the sanctity of marriage, that marriage is between a man and woman only, and that marriage is a picture of Christ’s union with the church. So we oppose homosexual marriage (and rightly so). But at the very same time that we so vocally defend the sanctity of marriage, divorce runs rampant in the church, and many of us who aren’t divorced are harsh, impatient, cold, or unloving toward our spouses. It’s a different package than homosexuality, but it still dishonors marriage. In a similar way, we declare that our culture’s sexually explicit movies and songs and TV shows pervert God’s beautiful design for sex (and that’s true), but we are silent as adultery and pornography contaminate the lives of church members. Different package, same problem. Another example: In one breath, we cry out against hatred and war as an affront against the love and grace of God, but in the next breath, we mercilessly criticize other Christians, because they do church a little differently than we do. Different package, same problem. It’s subtle, but it’s so dangerous. We judge certain sins, and we are a complete hypocrite because those same sins take a different expression in our own lives. We need to be as honest and as concerned about the sin in our own lives as we are about others. Do not judge hypocritically.

Instead, judge honestly. And there’s really two things I mean by this. First, be honest about your own sin. Don’t pretend that you’re perfect as you point out everyone else’s flaws. We’ve already covered that. But second, also make sure you’re honest about other people’s sins. This is the area that we tend to shy away from. Our culture says that nobody has any right to confront anyone else about sin. In fact, our culture says nobody has any right to even call something a sin. But that’s not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that we are to love one another, and part of loving one another is holding each other accountable and graciously saying the hard things when necessary.

Think about our text today. If your brother has sawdust in his eye, are you loving him if you ignore it and leave it there? No, you love him by pointing it out and helping him remove it. You shouldn’t ignore the problem. You should be honest about it so you can help fix it.

And you know what Jesus’ sawdust-in-the-eye really reminds me of? It reminds me of when you’ve got something hanging out of your nose. It is awful to be talking to somebody and not know that you’ve got something hanging out of your nose. And a true friend will tell you that something is hanging out of your nose. They won’t ignore it. They’ll be honest about it. And yes, it might be awkward for just a second, and you might be momentarily embarrassed, but you’ll be glad they didn’t let you walk around for 30 minutes with a cliff hanger.

But somehow our culture has come to the place where we act like the nice thing to do is to ignore all of the sinful junk that is hanging out of our noses and pretend everything is okay. It’s not okay. And the most loving thing we can do is be honest and point out sin and hold each other accountable.

I remember when I was in third grade, I was on an elementary basketball team. And one game I decided I really wanted to be the leading scorer on the team. So I just kept shooting and shooting and shooting. I made a few shots and ended up scoring 15 or 20 points. And I ran over to my Dad after the game and started bragging about how many points I had scored. And I remember Dad looked me right in the eye, and he said, “You may have scored a lot of points, but you didn’t play very well. Almost anybody would score that much if they shot as much as you did. A really good player learns when to shoot and when to pass, and he makes all of his teammates better.” That was hard for me to hear. A lot of people today would probably say my dad should never have said something like that to me. It might damage my self-esteem or give me a complex. But let me tell you something, it was good for me to hear that. Dad was being honest with me, because he really did want me to be a better player and a better person. And the most loving thing he could do was to tell me the hard but honest truth.

So don’t judge hypocritically, but do judge honestly. Hold one another accountable, and love each other enough to graciously say the hard things when necessary. Don’t judge hypocritically… but do judge honestly.

The third balanced truth is do not judge people’s hearts. Instead, judge by holding to the truths of Scripture. Listen to what Paul says about this in 1 Corinthians 4. He says, *“I care very little if I am judged by you or any human court; indeed I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me… He will… expose the motives of men’s hearts.”*

Paul says, “You can’t accurately judge my heart, because you can’t see the motives of my heart. No human can see the motives of my heart. Even I can’t clearly see the motives of my own heart. Sometimes, my own heart deceives me. Only God can judge my heart, because only God can see the motives of my heart.”

So you should not judge people’s hearts. But then Paul goes on in the very next verse to explain how we should judge. In 1 Corinthians 4:6, he says, *“Do not go beyond what is written.”* What does that mean? Well, in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul uses the phrase “It is written” 12 different times to quote the Bible. “It is written” refers to the Bible. So when Paul says, “Do not go beyond what is written,” he is saying, “Do not go beyond the Bible.” In other words, you judge by holding to the teachings of Scripture. You judge whether people’s teaching matches Scripture, and you judge whether their actions match Scripture… that’s what Jesus means by judging their fruit. But you don’t judge their hearts, because you can’t see their hearts.

And the important thing to see here is that this means you aren’t really the judge at all; Scripture is. Scripture is the authority, not you. Scripture passes the judgment. You just acknowledge that Scripture is right. People don’t have to answer to your preferences and your opinions and your whims. People answer to Scripture. Do not go beyond what is written.

And we need to be very careful here, because this is a hard one for us. A lot of us have a tendency to treat our opinions and our preferences as if they are as authoritative as Scripture. We judge people’s hearts based on our own opinions and preferences, even when the Bible is silent on the issue. For example, I have heard way too many Christians over the years who criticize how you-know-who does church out in California or how so-and-so does church up in Chicago or how he-who-must-not-be-named does church in Seattle. But the reasons they give for their criticism aren’t biblical reasons. They just disagree with the pastor’s methods or models or programs or styles or the way he dresses. Listen, those things are not outlined in Scripture, so do not go beyond what is written. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand because the Lord is able to make him stand. That’s Romans 14. If Scripture is silent, who are you to judge someone else’s servant? If Scripture is silent, don’t judge people based on your opinions.

The same thing goes for all sorts of other little issues that you hear in way too many churches. What should the weekly schedule be, what style of music should you sing, should the preacher wear a tie, what should you print in the worship guide, when should you take up the offering… You’re not going to find specific commands in Scripture about any of those things, so do not go beyond what is written. Don’t judge other people based on your opinions. Your opinions have no authority! Scripture is our only authority! And even if people disagree with your opinions, by all means, don’t judge their hearts. You can’t see their hearts. Judge only by holding to Scripture. That is our only authority. So don’t judge people’s hearts. Judge by holding to the truths of Scripture.

And as we get ready to close, here’s what I hope: I hope we have torn down that crumbly old sandcastle and built a nice, dry, new one in its place. I hope we’ve torn down the rotten unbiblical teaching that says you can never judge anyone at any time in any way. That is not what the Bible teaches, and that is not what Jesus means in Matthew 7:1. And I hope we have built up a biblical understanding of how you really should judge. I pray that you will not judge harshly… but that you will judge humbly. I pray that you will not judge hypocritically… but that you will judge honestly. I pray that you will not judge people’s hearts… but that you will judge by holding to the teaching of Scripture. I pray that you will not be hypocritical or arrogant or self-righteous in your judgments… but that you will lovingly and graciously hold one another accountable to the standards of Scripture. And I pray that God will be honored as we submit only to the authority of His Word.