

Jesus' Moral Guidance

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Matthew

In Jesus' famous proclamation, "Judge not, that you will not be judged" (Matthew 7:1), Jesus calls us to realism about ourselves that will keep us from picking at others.

On the surface, we may wonder if refraining from judgment is even possible in the workplace. After all, successful work often depends on making assessments of other people's performance and character. We must decide whom to trust, whom to choose as partners, whom to employ, and which organization to join. It is not this honest assessment that Jesus admonishes, but hypocritical judgment based on our biased perceptions. "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5).

Clearly, all people run the risk of making judgments of which we are unaware. Partly, this is because we see in others whatever serves to make us feel better about ourselves. Partly, it is to justify our own actions when we do not act as servants to them. Partly, it is because we lack the time or inclination to collect true information. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount tells us that these judgments are not merely an inevitable byproduct of working with others, but an important moral issue.

On our own, it may be impossible to overcome false judgmentalism. This is why consistent, fact-based assessment systems are so important in workplaces. A good performance appraisal system requires managers to gather real evidence of performance, to discuss differing perceptions with employees, and to recognize common biases. We can accomplish some of the same impartiality by noticing when we are forming a judgment against someone else and asking: “What role do I have in deciding this? What evidence leads me to that conclusion? How does this judgment benefit me? What would the other person say in response?” Perhaps the surest way to remove the log in our own eye is to take our judgment directly to the other person and ask them to respond to our perception.

If we have time for only one question before making a decision about someone else, the best question may be, “Is this how I would want to be treated?” Jesus sums it up this way: “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12). When we think of others with grace and treat them in the way we would want to be treated, we restore right relationships in the workplace and everywhere else.

After Jesus teaches about the kingdom of heaven coming to earth in his Sermon on the Mount, in the following two chapters of Matthew 8 and 9 we see him enacting God’s kingdom through deeds of compassion and mercy. He heals an ostracized leper, he has compassion on an officer of the

Roman occupying forces, and he delivers demoniacs from misery. The compassion that Jesus explained in words is now demonstrated in concrete actions which heal others and reclaim God's creation.

Given the time Jesus spent healing people, it is surprising that most people think of him as a preacher rather than as a doctor. The point is that for Jesus there is no separation between word and deed, between the secular and the sacred, or between the spiritual and physical aspects of announcing the kingdom of God come to earth.