

Let's get straight down to the nitty gritty of what Jesus was saying:

Verse 37: *Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.*

On first reading that sounds fair and reasonable. The problem is we unconsciously judge all the time. Take my short drive into church this morning.

The car in front of me was going way too fast; obviously there was a maniac behind the wheel. But when he turned right at the roundabout, I found myself crawling behind a car where the driver was obviously living so far in the past, he thought you still needed someone to walk in front waving a red flag. Why couldn't they drive like I always do – I mean, my speed is always just right.

I say that confidently because I came top in all four disciplines on a 3-week advanced driving course when I was in the police.

Of course, although it's true, I said that merely to illustrate how easy it could be to slip into feeling superior. My more recent attendances on driver awareness courses suggests I'm not superior by a long country mile. No one can quantitatively know how good or bad their driving might be compared to others; but that doesn't stop us being judgemental.

It is so easy to judge, even without meaning to.

No matter how hard we try, we are always drawn to making judgemental decisions because we live in a culture which promotes comparisons in all aspects of our lives. We judge ourselves and others against any number of criteria whether it be in what we do, who we mix with, where we live, or even what we think other people think. It is all too easy for us to compare our lot to that of others; consciously or unconsciously exhibiting a sense of superiority or inferiority.

Let me show you what I mean in a sketch featuring John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett.

Whilst it's true that often we become judgemental as a way of either boosting our own self-image such as when John Cleese declares that he has innate breeding or sadly to deny our true self-worth as in Ronnie Corbett's, *I know my place* we are also guilty of judging others without realising we are being judgemental.

And that is what Jesus is trying to teach; the folly of feeling superior and being quick to recognise the faults in others whilst completely failing to see our own shortcomings. But he does so in a lovely self-deprecating way. After all, everyone would know that Jesus the master carpenter would certainly know all about planks and sawdust!

Jesus is not only making a serious point through the medium of humour and laughter, but also inviting us not to take ourselves too seriously; to laugh at our own self-importance. Who are we to feel smug or superior to others? Are we perfect? No of course not.

And it's true. I found out early in life that when you are the first to laugh at yourself, everyone else tends to laugh with you, not at you.

Sometimes though, that is easier said than done, because what people criticise in others can be a reflection of what they are subconsciously aware of – or indeed afraid of – in themselves. Psychologists would call this ‘projection’, where you try to avoid your own serious problem by telling someone about their tiny problem.

And if you are in a position of authority or leadership then the situation can be made much worse when solely through your own plank filled vision others blindly follow – the blind leading the blind, to paraphrase verse 39.

And of course, when Jesus made this point, he would have had the Pharisees in mind.

They were constantly demanding obedience to every minute clause and sub-clause of the religious law to ensure that Israel’s holiness would shine out so brightly and make them different *from* all other nations. Totally missing the point, that the law was supposed to make Israel shine out brightly *to* all the nations.

The Pharisees were wrong. Although I can only say that with the benefit of hindsight and being aware of two thousand years of accumulated wisdom.

Maybe if the Pharisees knew what we now know they could have laughed at themselves and instead of looking down on everyone else, looked up to Jesus and said *we know our place*.

Rev. Terry Ward-Hall, 13 February 2022