

Follow Jesus – To Judge or Not to Judge?

3/18/18 - Pastor Randy

"Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. ² For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

³ "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? ⁴ How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye?⁵ Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

⁶ "Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don't throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you. Matt. 7:1-6 (NLT)

The first phrase in this passage we just read – “Do not judge” is one of the most quoted statements of Jesus. The interesting thing about the popularity of this “Jesus saying” is that, for many people it is the only saying of Jesus they ever quote and just about the only thing Jesus said they can recall. The ironic thing about the popularity of this saying is that it is used to communicate something Jesus never intended to communicate: The notion that we should refrain from ever describing another person’s behavior as morally and ethically out of bounds. The other irony is that those who use this saying to shield themselves from spiritual correction are rarely willing to extend the same right to others. Jesus “Don’t judge” saying is treated as it means, “Don’t judge me...but I will be happy to judge you.”

If these words were meant to prohibit making any moral pronouncements or ever correcting the conduct of others, then Jesus was either the biggest hypocrite of all, or He was teaching that he alone had the right to judge people but His disciples were to refrain from doing so. Neither is the case.

When you read beyond Matt. 7:1 we quickly realize that Jesus is not ruling out the practice of making moral judgments or confronting people about their sin. He said, *"first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."* Jesus gives us permission to address the sin in the lives of others...after we have taken care of our own.

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In addition, if you look at 7:15-16 you find Jesus saying, “Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act.” That sure sounds like judging to me! “You can identify them by their actions.” Jesus calls his disciples to be discerning in their relationships and evaluate behavior for the purpose of protecting God’s people.

We need to interpret all of the NT commands and principles that dictate and guide the way we relate to others through the filter of the command to love God and your neighbor as yourself. In other words, the kind of judging that should take place between brothers and sisters is the kind that is motivated by love for God and people and expresses love to God and people.

Throughout the sermon on the mount Jesus has been distinguishing between authentic righteousness and an appearance of righteousness. In this passage Jesus continues that theme by distinguishing righteous judgment from unrighteous judgment. As we have learned, righteous attitudes, affections and actions, are those that fulfill the foundational commandments; the commands to love God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself.

In John 7 we find a situation where Jesus was “judging” (i.e. rebuking) the religious leaders for unjust judgements they had made about Him because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. Jesus’ response was not, “Don’t judge me”, but rather, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with righteous judgment.” Their judgment of Jesus actions was not motivated by a desire to maintain God’s honor, neither was it out of love for Jesus, but rather it was motivated by a jealous inspired hatred in their hearts towards Jesus.

Jesus’ words in this passage address two equal and opposite problems.

A. The problem of judging in an unrighteous manner.

B. The failure to judge righteously. The problem of tolerating sin and evil.

Neglecting to judge immoral, unethical, and unjust conduct as such.

A. Unrighteous judgment.

We are guilty of exercising unrighteous judgement when we:

1. When we act as hypocrites, judging others for their failure to live up to moral and ethical standards while ignoring our failure to do the same. In his book, *Cries of the Heart*, Ravi Zacharias writes: *"A couple of years ago I read on the front page of a well-known international newspaper, the story of a truck driver in Italy who habitually visited brothels when he was on the road. On one occasion, an associate told him about the best brothel he had been to and who he should ask for to receive the best service. He decided to follow up on the recommendation even though it was so close to home. When he arrived at the brothel he asked for the services of that particular prostitute and awaited her arrival. To his utter shock and anger, when the woman walked into the room he discovered she was his wife. He was enraged, realizing that while he had been on the road his wife had been making a living through prostitution. Totally out of control, he grabbed her and would have killed her had he not been restrained."* We can shake our heads in disbelief that a man could be so enraged at another person's sin while so completely at peace with his own! But if we honestly evaluate our own lives we will discover situations where we have been much more tolerant of our own sins than we are of the sins of others.

Jesus used humor to emphasize his point and make it memorable. He said how can you look right past the beam in your own eye to see the tiny speck in your neighbor's eye. What a picture of hypocrisy!

2. When we establish moral and ethical standards that are not supported by scripture, but according to our own preferences and opinions. This is exactly what the religious leaders of Jesus day often did. They developed rules for applying God's law and treated these rules as if they carried equal weight to God's law. Jesus called their rules "man-made laws and blasted them because sometimes these rules undermined the actual law and at other times their rules made carrying out the law of God excessively burdensome.

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They tried to use the law about honoring the Sabbath as a club to beat Jesus down for healing a man lame from birth.

3. The judgmental, critical, accusatory posture that some people assume towards others.

This posture is not motivated by love, but by an inclination to see the worst in people, to believe the worst about people, because it casts the critic in a greater light. This is a sad reality but a reality nonetheless: We experience displeasure at the success of another because their success makes us feel less so. Without the Spirit's work in our heart we have a tendency to experience delight at the demise or failure of others because their failure, their sin, makes us feel more like a success; more self-righteous and self-satisfied.

"Love is patient. Love believes all things." You are much less likely to believe a bad report about someone you love than someone you despise. Question: How do we feel when someone falls? Do we take delight in another person's failure? Do we want to see people fail? Are we reticent to believe a good report about someone? Have we so demonized those who disagree with us that we can never imagine them possibly repenting and acting righteously?

In His classic, *Mere Christianity*, CS Lewis wrote: "Suppose one reads a story of filthy atrocities in the paper. Then suppose that something turns up suggesting that the story might not be quite true, or not quite so bad as it was made out. Is one's first feeling, 'Thank God, even they aren't quite so bad as that,' or is it a feeling of disappointment, and even a determination to cling to the first story for the sheer pleasure of thinking your enemies are as bad as possible? If it is the second then it is, I am afraid, the first step in a process which, if followed to the end, will make us into devils. You see, one is beginning to wish that black was a little blacker. If we give that wish its head, later on we shall wish to see grey as black, and then to see white itself as black. Finally, we shall insist on seeing everything -- God and our friends and

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ourselves included -- as bad, and not be able to stop doing it: we shall be fixed for ever in a universe of pure hatred."

Remember: God's word describes Satan as "the accuser of the brethren". This judgmental, critical, accusatory, merciless posture towards others is what Jesus was addressing when he began with, "Judge not, so you will not be judged". If you condemn rather than show mercy, expect no mercy in return!

B. Righteous Judgement is essential because without it we end up with an unhealthy and destructive tolerating and condoning of evil. We have already seen that Jesus allows for taking the speck out of our brother's eye. The only person in a position to do that is the person who has taken the beam out of their own eye. Holding someone else accountable for their sin requires a great deal of humility. You must not only make self correction your top priority, but you also must see your sin as greater than the other persons!! Only the person who feels as Paul felt, "I am the worst of sinners", possesses the kind of humility that can correct others. Galatians 6:1 offers us great wisdom with how to administer accountability. *"Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself."* Here are the three essential ingredients to spiritual accountability: 1. The goal is restoration, not condemnation. It is redemptive rather than punitive in nature. 2. It must be administered gently 3. It must be administered with empathy; the attitude "but for the grace of God go I", leading to a priority on self-correction.

Jesus' words in verse 6 have caused many to stumble. Why would Jesus call people dogs and pigs? did not describe people as dogs and pigs because they lacked value of normal human beings. He wasn't making a statement about their lack of value but about their lack of a sense of value; their inability or unwillingness to treat that which was sacred as sacred. People act like dogs and pigs when they demean and despise it that which is sacred. You've all

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heard the phrase, “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you”. It is also wise not to keep feeding the hand that bites you! Jesus is calling on his disciples to exercise discernment with the use of their time.

As I mentioned earlier, in Matt. 7:15 Jesus told his disciples to beware of false prophets who he described as wolves who threaten to destroy God’s sheep. This call to exercising judgment is motivated by love because it is done for the purpose of protecting God’s people.

When I was a youth pastor I had a young man who started attending our youth ministry, not because he was interested in God, but because he was interested in girls. I reached out to this young man with the hopes of influencing him for Christ. I would take him and another kid to the park after school and play stickball or handball, in an attempt to show him the love of Christ with the hopes that his heart would be softened to the gospel. We had a young girl in our group who was pursuing a relationship with Christ and this young man began to pursue her and they started dating. I approached her and I told her that it was unwise for her to date this young man because of his lack of commitment to Christ and his character in general. A couple of days later the young ladies’ mother came to see me to complain that I was judging this young man unfairly. She told me he had a good heart and implied that I needed to get to know him. I was a little put off because I had taken the time to go the extra mile and reach out to this kid and make him feel accepted while at the same time not pretending that he was someone he clearly wasn’t. I told the mom I was looking out for the spiritual and physical safety of her daughter but from her perspective I was being too judgmental. Well it wasn’t very long after that this young man was arrested because he and some friends jumped some other kids where a couple of the kids were stabbed. The next thing you know this young teen girl was approached by some of the victim’s friends letting her know that she better watch her back because they were coming for her.

Now, I could have gone back to that mom and gloated, saying “See I was right!” But any satisfaction from having my actions vindicated was negated by the concern that one of my “spiritual daughters” was in physical danger.

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Righteous judgments are those motivated by genuine love for God and people. If you are thinking love is not sufficient because it must also be a judgment that is accurate, not based on misinformation, I agree. But I would suggest to you, that the love of God, poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, prevents us from believing a bad report too quickly. Love seeks the truth. Love mitigates against a prejudicial bias towards another person.

Summary

God has called us to righteousness, and righteousness is concisely defined as acting in a manner that fulfills our high calling to love God with all our being and to love others as we love ourselves. Love for God and others will prevent us from a critical, judgmental, accusatory posture towards others. It will keep us from applying a double standard to others and ourselves. It will cause us to want to believe the best about people, while never pretending that sin is benign and evil is only a matter of opinion. We will be quick to confess our sins and slow to confront the sins of others. We will be humble and gentle when confronting others, but we will not deceive our brothers and sisters by condoning sin and evil in their lives.