

Do Not Judge

The words of scripture that we will study today are of both a practical and a Spiritual nature. They speak about the tendency within each of us to “judge” other people.

And they are so appropriate to our nature because as you and I observe the questionable behaviors and the attitudes of other people, there is a natural inclination within each of our hearts to immediately make a value judgment of those people and of their conduct.

But as we do that, we will often have other people say to us that we are not supposed to “judge”, that the bible tells us not to “judge” other people!

And that is true. The bible does tell us not to judge others. But do we rightly understand what the bible is really telling us about that inclination within our minds that some call “judging”?

As strange as it might sound, I believe that our inclination to judge is probably one of those parts of God’s image, one of those attributes of His character, that God has intentionally allowed to remain within our hearts and minds, even after the fall of our nature into sin, and then also even after we are saved.

Yes, the ability to rightly use that attribute and to make right and righteous value judgments of other people has been corrupted right along with the other parts of our nature. But even so, I do believe that God has considered this thing that some call “judging” to be a necessary attribute to be left remaining within us in order to help us in the making of many of our daily choices and decisions.

But again, with that being said, God does require us to be very careful in the way that we use that attribute. Our sinful nature, being as corrupt to its core as it is, does often go astray of God’s intended purposes. And so, He tells us here in these words of Luke chapter 6, verse 37 to,

³⁷“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:37)

Let me say this again! The nature and the inclination of our heart to judge another person, their value, their worth, their abilities, the intents of their words

and behaviors and attitudes can, and so very often do, cause real difficulties to take place, both in our own hearts and in the lives of the ones we are judging.

And here in the words of this scripture passage, the Lord Jesus is giving us a strong and direct command against it. He tells us simply that we should not “judge” anyone.

And He gives us the very same instruction in Matthew chapter 7. There, He tells us to

¹“Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. (Matthew 7:1-2)

And note carefully in these words, that Jesus adds a warning that there are penalties that will be put back upon our own head if we cross that line and begin to wrongly judge other people. And so, you and I must guard our responses carefully, lest we find ourselves in trouble, both with God and with the people we are judging.

But with all this being said, the matter of “judging others” and our understanding of the meaning of it all, is not as simple a thing as some might consider it to be. There are times and there are circumstances that demand that we be very cautious about the actions and the behaviors of other people. And that can look a lot like we are judging them.

But when we are personally involved with those people and with the choices they are making, we really do need to decide whether we should remain a part of their plans and their behaviors. And that means that we need to stop and carefully evaluate those people’s intentions and behaviors.

And so, as you and I encounter instructions such as these about not judging people, we need to stop and ask the Lord what He really means with His words. And also, how are we to apply those meanings. Because unfortunately, too often within the culture of our day, words will take on new and different meanings, meanings that are not exactly what God intended for them to be.

And that is one of the many reasons that you and I need to be reading these scriptures regularly, daily. It’s the only way that God will be able to “speak” His truths and His meanings into our hearts and minds.

As for this matter of “judging others”, does Jesus mean that as we observe the conduct and the behavior of other people, we are never to question and make determinations as to the rightness or wrongness of their actions and behaviors?

And are these words to apply to every venue of daily life, our families, our churches, our workplaces, our neighborhoods?

Does Jesus mean that we are not even to examine the behavior of our own children and make determinations about the rightness or wrongness of their behaviors, so that we might teach them a more Godly behavior?

Are we being commanded to turn a blind eye to obviously errant and ungodly behavior on the part of our church leaders, our Pastors, Deacons and Elders?

And in our workplaces, are we to abide with any form of abhorrent behavior and business practice in order to not be found judgmental?

Again, what does Jesus really mean with His words? How rigidly are we to apply them and to what extent do we take their meaning?

As we stop to ask God for His answers to these questions today, may we begin with a basic truth that must be applied, and that truth is, that “God’s word will never conflict with itself.”

Let me repeat that very simple but absolute truth! “God’s word will never conflict with itself!”

In other words, these commands from scripture that tell us not to judge one another, and the commands that tell us to recognize wrong behavior in our children and to train them up and discipline them, do not conflict with each other.

And the commands in scripture that tell us to examine our church leaders and to hold them to high standards of conduct do not conflict with the commands not to judge them.

And the commands in these scriptures that tell us to not yoke ourselves together with unbelievers, whether that be in marriage, or work relationships or friendships, does not conflict with the command not to judge them.

And the commands in these scriptures that tell us to love not the world, neither the things of this world, but instead to “come out and be separate” from the world, does not conflict with the command not to judge the world and those who choose to remain a part of it.

The dilemma that we face with understanding these very contrasting words is one that cannot be easily resolved. In fact, you and I will never, on our own, be able to adequately understand their meaning. Our minds are simply too small.

But we must take heart and understand that that is all by God's own purposeful design. He does not intend for you and me to be able to comprehend matters such as these on our own. He wants to be the one who comprehends them for us, and in us!

That truth is given clearly to us in one of my favorite passages of scripture, 1 Corinthians chapter 2, words that I have shared with you often, but that I would like to share with you again today. Listen to these words carefully! 1 Corinthians 2, verse 6,

⁶ . . . we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

⁹But as it is written:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

¹⁰But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

¹³These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:6-14)

These words tell us clearly that our natural means of understanding cannot comprehend the things of God, that Spiritual truths are spiritually discerned. God's Spirit, who lives within those of us who have received Christ as our Savior and Lord, reaches into our own spirit and discerns truth for us.

So then, as we examine these simple words that tell us to,

³⁷"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. (Luke 6:37)

In rightly understanding God's meaning of these scriptures, by His Spirit, we can know, with a certainty, that as we carefully remain within His Will, we can then tread into otherwise uncertain areas of understanding with the confidence that we will not violate God's purposes and his intents. And yes, we can and must make necessary decisions regarding the behavior and conduct of other people, and still remain within God's will.

So then, how do we do that? How do we properly, "discern the actions, the behaviors and the conduct of other people, without wrongfully judging them"?

The answer to our questions rests within the words that I just read. The answers are provided for us through the special unction of God's Holy Spirit. Our part is to yield our hearts, our souls, and especially our emotions simply and humbly to God's special unction.

But before that will ever take place within us, we must do a thing that I have exhorted us to do on so many occasions, and that is, you and I must allow our Christianity to progress on past just being a simple set of rules and guidelines that we try our best to live by.

Folks, good principles are good, but by themselves, they are not God's intent for us, and they simply do not and will not work. God's intent is that our religion instead be an intimate love relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said those very words when he was asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" Without hesitation, He said that we are to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength; and He added that we must love others in the same way that we love ourselves.

Note that those words speak nothing about guidelines and principles to live by. They speak of deep and intimate love for the very Person of Christ. And folks, that kind of love can cause a judgmental spirit to simply go away, or to not rise up to begin with.

And also, you and I must intentionally reach forward to love our friends, our enemies, our neighbors, our co-workers, our children, our husband, our wife. When we do that, then our thoughts, our actions and our behaviors change toward them.

But again, to be able to do that, our spirit must be filled with God's Spirit. If and to the extent that God's Spirit is allowed free reign within our own spirit, that is the extent to which we will be able to overcome our natural and emotional responses and to begin to discern God's intentions and His desires for those other people.

So, what then should our responses be as we are confronted with matters and circumstances that provoke us to "judge" another person?

First, we must understand that we do not have the authority or the privilege to be a "judge" of another person.

A "judge" is a person who is endowed with the position and the authority to sit in a seat of judgment, a person who not only made the law, but has the authority to determine if that law is being violated. And the judge's authority does not end with simply making discernments about matters. It extends on to the carrying out of the proper punishment for the violation that has taken place. The judge effectively has the power and the authority to be the judge, the jury and the executioner.

And that, unfortunately, is most often the process that takes place within our minds as we judge one another. And that is what Jesus is not allowing us to do.

Who among us has the position and the authority to be judge, jury and executioner over another person? None! Ultimately, only Christ alone has the authority to judge people. Jesus was the lawgiver and because of that, He and He alone has the authority to judge and to carry out the penalties. And at the end of time, Christ alone will sit as "Judge of all the earth", and each person, you and I, will stand before Him and be judged.

But with that being said, what about all of those other people and circumstances that we spoke about a moment ago? What about all those moments throughout our day in which we are required to make needful forms of discernments and decisions concerning them, our children and other family members, our co-workers, our employers, employees who work for us, our neighbors, our church leaders, and others?

The truth regarding all those people and circumstances is that yes, God does allow and He even requires that we make determinations regarding their actions and behaviors. And He further requires us to act upon those determinations.

There are however limitations to the boundaries of our responses. No, we are not to gather with kindred spirits and make scathing judgments and gossipy remarks about them. If we have no real reason to be considering their conduct and behavior, then we simply should not busy ourselves with it.

But yes, in matters such as with our own children, we are, without hesitation, to observe and recognize whether our children are acting in an appropriate and Godly manner. We are not to condemn them for their errant behavior. We are to instead, train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

And yes, if within our employment we are charged with the responsibility of supervising other employees and their work efforts, we are then responsible to determine if those employees are doing the work they are required to do and then to hold them accountable for the quality of their work.

And yes, we are to observe and recognize when our neighbors and our co-workers have sinful behaviors. But our response must be to pray earnestly for them. And yes, as opportunities present themselves, we are to witness the truths of God to them. But it should all be for the intent of reclaiming them to the paths of God.

And yes, we are to observe and recognize when our church brethren and even our church leaders are conducting themselves in a sinful manner. Matthew chapter 18 gives us an excellent set of directions for those circumstances. And most often, the discipline should only be determined by the church leaders who are charged with handling such matters.

And yes, we are to observe and recognize when our governmental leaders are behaving wrongfully. But our response must be to pray for them and not condemn them. Remember, their success is also the success of our nation. And we should want that.

Folks, it does neither us nor others any good to simply sit and gossip and complain, becoming the judge, jury and executioner of those who are doing wrong things. Yes, they may be doing very wrong things, but the boundary lines delegated to us by the Lord end with "mercy" and "grace".

We are to mercifully discipline our children. We are to mercifully carry out our responsibilities as bosses in the workplace, and as voters in the voting booth.

We are to pray and beseech God to have mercy upon each one that we see in sin. We are not to condemn. God will take care of the condemnation in the days of final judgment.

So then, knowing our boundaries and limitations, I urge each of us to be filled with God's Holy Spirit so that we can show forth mercy and grace and be careful not to judge.

Listen again as we close, verse 37

³⁷"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. (Luke 6:37)

May we pray.