

The Commands of Christ

Sermon # 13

Judge Not

(Mt. 7:1-3)

Few sayings of the Lord are better known or more often quoted than the next command of the Lord, *“Do not judge lest you be judged your-selves.”* Likewise few saying are more misunderstood or misapplied. We are told loud and long that no one has the right to judge the actions of another person. They interpret this to mean that we cannot judge what is right and wrong in any case or any situation and especially don't try to tell me that what I'm doing is wrong.

Nothing is more important in our society than being tolerant; of other viewpoints, religions and lifestyles, so much so that the fear of being deemed intolerant or judgmental has taken on epidemic proportions.

But we need to realize that Christian tolerance does not commit us to a relativistic perspective. Being tolerant doesn't mean that we cannot criticize what goes on around us. Tolerance doesn't require us to approve of what other people believe and do. It is one thing to insist that other people have the right to express their basic convictions; it is another thing to say that they are right in doing so. To say that all beliefs and values deserve to be treated as if they were equal is to endorse relativism—a perspective that is incompatible with Christian faith and practice. Christian tolerance does not mean refusing to make judgments about what is good and true. For one thing, it really isn't possible to be completely nonjudgmental. Even telling someone else that she is being judgmental is a rather judgmental thing to do!

So what Does This Verse Command Us To Do?

“Judge not, that you be not judged.”

The imperative here is *“judge not.”* To understand what is being commanded we must first used what is meant by “judge.” *“The main Greek word for “judge” is krino. It means to determine, to decide mentally or judicially, to form an opinion, to try, to condemn, to punish.”* [Commands of Christ. The Curriculum of the Great Commission. Series 3 (Oakbrook, Illinois; Institute in Basic Life Principles, 2002) p.5]. The command is not a command to be blind but rather to be generous.

Is Jesus really telling us not to judge at all? Does the command forbid all value judgments? No, of course not.

In 1 John 4:1 we are told to test those who would preach to us. *“Beloved do not believe every spirit but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*

When Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 5:11,

“But I have written you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person.” That of course demands that we make a judgment of some sort.

Let’s look at what we are told about judging that we can glean from Scripture.

First, Beware of Judging By Appearance Alone.

We are told in John 7:24 *“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgement.”*

The following story appeared in the newsletter “Our America: “Dodie Gadiant, a schoolteacher for thirteen years, decided to travel across America and see the sights she had taught about. Traveling alone in a truck with camper in tow, she launched out. One afternoon rounding a curve on I-5 near Sacramento in rush-hour traffic, a water pump blew on her truck. She was tired, exasperated, scared, and alone. In spite of the traffic jam she caused, no one seemed interested in helping.

“Leaning up against the trailer, she prayed, ‘Please God, send me an angel ... preferably one with mechanical experience.’ Within four minutes, a huge Harley drove up, ridden by an enormous man sporting long, black hair, a beard and tattooed arms. With an incredible air of confidence, he jumped off and, without even glancing at Dodie, went to work on the truck. Within another few minutes, he flagged down a larger truck, attached a tow chain to the frame of the disabled Chevy, and whisked the whole 56-foot rig off the freeway onto a side street, where he calmly continued to work on the water pump.

“The intimidated schoolteacher was too dumbfounded to talk. Especially when she read the paralyzing words on the back of his leather jacket: ‘Hell’s Angels—California.’ As he finished the task, she finally got up the courage to say, ‘Thanks so much,’ and carry on a brief conversation. Noticing her surprise at the whole ordeal, he looked her straight in the eye and mumbled, ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover. You may not know who you’re talking to.’ With that, he smiled, closed the hood of the truck, and straddled his Harley. With a wave, he was gone as fast as he had appeared.” Given half a chance, people often crawl out of the boxes into which we’ve relegated them. [Larry D. Wright www.bible.org/illus/j/j-13.htm]

Beware of Judging By Appearance Alone... and

Secondly, Beware of Judging Inner Motivation

We sometimes criticize others unfairly. We don't know all their circumstances, nor their motives. Only God, who is aware of all the facts, is able to judge people righteously.

Third, Beware of Snap Judgments Not Grounded In Fact

For some reason, it is easier to jump to negative conclusions about people than it is to assume the best about them. When we do this, we ascribe to them bad intentions and evil purposes that may not be true. We also reveal something about ourselves, for the faults we see in others are actually are reflection of our own.

I read a story about a Cookie Thief that I really liked that I think illustrates this point.

*“A woman was waiting at an airport one night.
With several long hours before her flight.
She hunted for a book in the airport shop,
Bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop.*

*She was engrossed in her book, but happened to see,
That the man beside her, as bold as could be,
Grabbed a cookie or two from the bag between,
Which she tried to ignore, to avoid a scene.*

*She read, munched cookies, and watched the clock,
As the gutsy “cookie thief!” diminished her stock.
She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by,
Thinking, “If I wasn’t so nice, I’d blacken his eye!”*

*With each cookie she took, he took one, too.
When only one was left, she wondered what he’d do.
With a smile on his face and a nervous laugh,
He took the last cookie and broke it in half.*

*He offered her half, as he ate the other.
She snatched it from him and thought, “Oh brother,
This guy has some nerve, and he’s also rude,
Why, he didn’t even show any gratitude!”*

*She had never known when she had been so galled,
And sighed with relief when her flight was called.
She gathered her belongings and headed for the gate,
Refusing to look back at the “thieving ingrate.”*

*She boarded the plane and sank in her seat,
Then sought her book, which was almost complete.*

*As she reached in her baggage, she gasped with surprise.
There was her bag of cookies in front of her eyes!*

*"If mine are here," she moaned with despair,
"Then the others were his and he tried to share!"
Too late to apologize, she realized with grief,
That she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief!"*

[Source Unknown - www.bible.org/illus/j/j-13.htm]

Beware of Snap Judgments Not Grounded In Fact and....

Fourth, Beware of The Temptation to Use Ourselves As a Standard of Measure

The ultimate reason for this is found in verse

two where we read, "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. (3) And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? (4) Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me remove the speck from your eye"; and look, a plank is in your own eye? (5) Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Jesus saying "make sure the problem is not yours.

The story is told that "A man was having difficulty communicating with his wife and concluded that she was becoming hard of hearing. So he decided to conduct a test without her knowing about it. One evening he sat in a chair on the far side of the room. Her back was to him and she could not see him. Very quietly he whispered, "Can you hear me?" There was no response. Moving a little closer, he asked again, "Can you hear me now?" Still no reply. Quietly he edged closer and whispered the same words, but still no answer. Finally he moved right in behind her chair and said, "Can you hear me now?" To his surprise and chagrin she responded with irritation in her voice, "For the fourth time, yes!" What a warning to us about judging! [Our Daily Bread, June 24, 1993 - www.bible.org/illus/nt/nt-42.htm]

All too often that which we are so quick to judge in the other person is also a problem in our own lives. Paul says in Romans 2:1, *"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things."* The problem here is the human tendency to harshly condemn in others the problem we have in our own lives.

A biblical example would be Judas when he condemned Mary for her extravagant display of affection for Jesus. After she had anointed Jesus with the fragrant oil Judas said in John 12:5-6; *"Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the*

poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box, and he used to take what was put into it.” Judas’ condemnation of Mary was prompted by his own guilt for the misuse of funds that were entrusted to him by the Lord. Human nature is very predictable. When we have problem in our lives, we begin to see in others, what is true in our own lives. If we find ourselves tempted to judge another person on any failure in their life, we should immediately recognize this as a signal to examine our own lives for a similar failure.

“At the turn of the century, the world’s most distinguished astronomer was certain there were canals on Mars. Sir Percival Lowell, esteemed for his study of the solar system, had a particular fascination with the Red Planet. When he heard, in 1877, that an Italian astronomer had seen straight lines crisscrossing the Martian surface, Lowell spent the rest of his years squinting into the eyepiece of his giant telescope in Arizona, mapping the channels and canals he saw. He was convinced the canals were proof of intelligent life on Mars, possibly an older but wiser race than humanity. Lowell’s observations gained wide acceptance. So eminent was he, none dared contradict him.

Now, of course, things are different. Space probes have orbited Mars and landed on its surface. The entire planet has been mapped, and no one has seen a canal. How could Lowell have “seen” so much that wasn’t there?

Two possibilities:

(1) He so WANTED to see canals that he did, over and over again, and

(2) We know now that he suffered from a rare eye disease that made him see the blood vessels in his own eye. The Martian “canals” he saw were nothing more than the bulging veins of his eyeballs. Today the malady is known as “Lowell’s syndrome.”

When Jesus (Matt. 7:1-3) warns that “in the same way you judge others, you will be judged” and warns of seeing “the speck of sawdust” in another’s eye while missing the plank in our own, could he not be referring to the spiritual equivalent of Lowell’s syndrome? Over and over, we “see” faults in others because we don’t want to believe anything better about them. And so often we think we have a first-hand view of their shortcomings, when in fact our vision is distorted by our own disease.” [Glenn W. McDonald. Readers Digest]

We will be fair in our judgments if we

Beware of judging by appearance alone

Beware of judging inner motivation.

Beware of Snap judgments not grounded in fact

Beware of the Temptation to use ourselves as the standard of judgment.