

June 29, 2008

Romans 2:1-4 / I Corinthians 4:1-5 / Luke 6:37-42

Luke #25 - Refusing to Judge Others – Getting the Plank Out of Our Own Eyes

I could have entitled this message: *“Developing a Christian or a Christlike Disposition,”* because even though the heading above the passage (at least in my Bible) says, “Judging Others,” it’s really about much more than simply judging others.

In fact, the key to understanding the passage (I believe) comes in verse 40 where Jesus says: *“A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.”*

In the context, that may be a warning to His disciples to be careful about who they choose as a teacher since they will inevitably be formed by the one who instructs them — for better or for worse. A “blind man” (that is one who is spiritually blind to the things of God) will lead his students into the same spiritual ditch he himself has fallen into (v. 39).

That’s why one must be careful about who’s instruction they submit themselves to, because a, “fully instructed student will (become) like his teacher.”

Yet it doesn’t take much reading into this “parable” to see that by the term “teacher” Jesus is speaking of Himself, which means we could paraphrase the verse this way:

“A disciple of Jesus is never above Jesus, but every disciple who is fully trained (or fully instructed) by Jesus will become like Jesus.”

And that is one of the primary goals of the Christian discipleship — To replicate the character of Jesus or disposition of Jesus in the disciples of Jesus. In fact, according to Romans 8:29, that’s the goal of both divine predestination and sanctification by the Spirit: *“For those God foreknew,”* says Paul, *“He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.”*

Likewise, in Galatians 4:19, Paul described his pastoral role as laboring with the Galatian believers, *“until Christ be formed in you.”* And in Eph. 4:12-13 he says the goal of Christian maturity is that we might, *“reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*

And I could go on and on citing similar passages, but the message is clear: *The more we come to know Jesus or be trained in the things of Jesus, the more we should reflect the image of Jesus in our lives.*

In fact, that's how we know if we're being instructed by Jesus, or submitting to the instruction of Jesus, or walking in step with the Spirit of Jesus whom we have received — our attitudes change and we begin to think like Jesus would think, and feel like Jesus would feel, and act like Jesus would act.

Because that, according to Jesus, is what the process of discipleship is intended to produce in us — a set of beliefs, and attitudes, and affections, and character traits similar to that of Jesus.

And THAT is what I believe we find described in this passage today: Five Distinct Aspects of the Christ's Own Character That He Would Have Us Pursue or Emulate in Our Lives.

What are they? Verse 37: Do not judge. / Verse 37b: Do not condemn. / Verse 37c: Be forgiving. / Verse 38: Be generous. / Verse 41-42: Do not be a hypocritical faultfinder.

So, without any delay, let's look at these five aspects of Christian character that Jesus seeks, through His instruction and through His Spirit to form in us.

And the **FIRST**, one we come across is ***"Do not judge..."*** Why? Because the last thing Jesus was, and the last thing He wants His disciples to be — is judgmental people. There is little you could do that would smack of being more unlike Jesus, than to exude a critical and judgmental spirit. But it goes further than that. We could also say there is little that turns people off to Christianity more than a Christian with a judgmental attitude toward others. And rightly so, because such an attitude was the antithesis of what Jesus was, and thus the antithesis of what Jesus wants us as His followers to be.

Remember, as the saying goes: "Your life is the only Bible some people will ever read." Your life is the only "life of Christ" some people will ever become familiar with — some people will judge the validity of Christianity on the basis of what they see in your life."

And that is a heavy responsibility! Whether we like it or not, when we proclaim ourselves to be a Christian, people unfamiliar with the Bible (and there are more and more every day) will be looking to our life to see what knowing and following Jesus produces in a person's life.

And in accordance with this passage we can say that one of the things knowing, following and submitting to Jesus should never produce in any Christian's life is a judgmental spirit—at least not if their "teacher" is the Jesus who explicitly tells us, "Do not judge..."

So we might ask: If we are explicitly told not to judge others, because judging is so contrary to the disposition of Christ, and the disposition we as His disciples are supposed to have, what exactly is it that we are not supposed to be doing?!

I get that question all the time! Probably because being judgmental (in our relativistic and inclusivistic culture, has by far become the most heinous of all sins. In some cases it's even become a crime punishable by law! It's not uncommon to be speaking to someone, and simply say you believe certain things are right and certain things are wrong, and have them say: "Now let's not be judgmental" — when you didn't say it in a judgmental way at all!

So let me clarify this right from the start: Holding to certain ethical standards (like the Ten Commandments) does not make one judgmental! To believe that giving false testimony in a court of law / or that stealing what doesn't belong to you is wrong does not make you judgmental. / To believe it's wrong for a husband or wife shouldn't commit adultery / or that we should refrain from murdering people, has nothing whatsoever to do with being judgmental!

If that were so, the Bible would be self-contradictory and Jesus (as well as Peter and Paul and John and all the other authors of Scripture) could be written off as being "judgmental" from the very start.

No. The "judgmentalness" that Jesus forbids does NOT mean we cannot believe in ethical absolutes or moral rights and wrongs. Nor does it include the habitually exercised and very necessary task of evaluating situations or using wise discernment. Everyone does that, and needs to do that every day!

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul actually asks the believers: ***"Are you not competent to judge trivial cases?"*** Or again, ***"Isn't there anyone among you wise enough to judge a dispute?"*** He's encouraging them to use their common sense, evaluate certain situations and come up with appropriate solutions. In Chapter 10 he repeats it: ***"Judge for yourselves what I say..."*** or again, ***"judge for your-selves what is proper..."***

You see, believers from the church there in Corinth were going before a secular civil judge and having their legal grievances against each other resolved by him. And Paul essentially says:

"Isn't there anyone in the church fellowship who can evaluate all the facts, and listen to both sides, and discern what happened and who's at fault and then make an objective moral judgment and come up with a resolution or plan of action for how the issue can be resolved? Isn't there anyone capable of doing that?"

So, Paul actually encourages judging of that nature — judging as in evaluating, discerning, trying to figure out what has happened to make two people at odds with each other, who may be at fault, and how things should be handled.

Although we must also remember that in the same book (in chapter 4) he says, *“Therefore, judge nothing before its appointed time — wait till the Lord comes.”*

That’s what many people fail to see. There are two very different forms of judging — one which is acceptable and encouraged and necessary, and the other which is not acceptable, forbidden and condemned by God. One which the Lord calls us to do and commends us for doing, and the other which the Lord categorically commands us never to engage in, and even assures us we need to repent for it if we have.

So, what is the “judging” Jesus forbids here and elsewhere? It’s the judgment of accusation where we seek to slander, trounce, belittle, punish, berate, or put others down for the purpose of making ourselves look better by comparison.

Its angry, vindictive judgment whereby we supply a motive we cannot know in order to paint others in a bad light.

It’s judgment fueled by animosity, a desire for revenge, prejudice, bigotry, condescension, a holier-than-thou self-righteousness, or an unloving desire to stand as a moral judge who somehow feels they are ethically or morally superior to those they judge.

That’s the type of judging Jesus forbids when He says: “Do not judge...”

And it’s not hard to figure out why we should never judge others in that critical, self-righteous, “I have it all together and you don’t” type fashion:

1st) It’s because no one (except Jesus) ever had it totally together morally and thus we must be careful to approach every moral situation with a continual air of humility, remembering we ourselves are all morally flawed as well.

I learned that lesson very early on in my ministry from a well-seasoned and retired pastor in New England. We were at a pastors gathering right after tele-evangelists Jimmy Swaggart and James Baker had fallen to sexual temptation, and the younger ministers (myself included) were verbally judging them.

And after a short while this older retired gentleman could keep silent no longer, called for our attention, and chastised us for our self-righteous attitudes of superiority, admonishing us with the phrase: "There, but by the grace of God, go I."

All too often we forget that. Apart from the sheer restraining grace of God, we are all capable of doing things we never thought possible for us to do. And if we don't think so, we are living in a state of blissful denial, and don't really know ourselves.

2nd) The other reason we should never judge in that critical, condemning, self-righteous, holier-than-thou fashion, is because our judgments are always based on partial information, partial understanding and inadequate knowledge. We can never be entirely aware of the inner lives and motives or things that drive people.

That's why Paul, when it comes to THAT TYPE OF JUDGING, encourages us to withhold all judgments of that sort "until the Lord comes." Because He alone is omniscient, and thus His judgments alone are based on a complete knowledge and a full understanding of every detail, every motive, every thought, every desire and every hidden or secret thing.

That's why God's judgments are always just, and never "judgmental" (and why we should refuse to play God by engaging in making them)!

Then **SECOND** Jesus tells us: "***Do not condemn...***" Here some people believe this is simply another way of saying, or better yet clarifying the first point in relation to judging, and they may be right. Because the thing that takes valid, legitimate and necessary moral evaluations and ethical discernments, and causes them to transgress what is appropriate and cross over into what is forbidden, is attaching to them an attitude of condemnation.

To condemn is to pronounce guilty. It is to want to see that person suffer. It is to want to see them damned. That's where the English word "condemn" comes from — it comes from the Latin "con" (which means with) and "demno" or "damno" – the idea being that in condemning a person we join in, join with, or voice our desire that that person be damned to hell.

That is we don't want them to receive mercy. We don't want them to experience pardon. We don't want to give them a second chance. Sort of like the woman caught in adultery, where a crowd of people bring her to Jesus wanting to stone her. And Jesus bends down and writes something in the dirt with his finger, and they all walk away with their heads down.

What did He write? No one knows for sure. But my guess is this — He wrote a woman's name in the sand, and then looked up at a certain man, and another woman's name and looked up at another man, or a man's name and looked up at a certain woman, and they all put their rocks down and began to disperse before He got too explicit! "Ok, Ok, we get it – let him who is without sin throw the first stone!"

What was the attitude of Christ? John tells us in the third chapter of his Gospel: ***"For God so loved the world, that He sent His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."***

Through Christ, God vividly displays for the whole world to see that His will is a saving will. His desire is that ***"all should repent and come to a knowledge of the truth."*** His will is that people would not be eternally punished for their sins but turn from their sins!

His will is a gracious, redeeming, restoring, and rescuing will. / An "I want to see people helped and changed and transformed" will! / It's a "be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful" will.

Is that the will, or attitude, or disposition you display? You see, it's not that we don't confront sin. We do! It's simply that we seek to restore rather than condemn the one who has sinned.

Even with the woman at the well, after the crowd disperses, Jesus looks at her and tells her very firmly: ***"Go and sin no more."*** Jesus doesn't condemn her, but He does command her to stop sinning.

Then **THIRD**, Jesus tells us, ***"Forgive, and you will be forgiven."*** So what characterizes a disciple of Jesus? They are forgiving people. They have a forgiving spirit. They try not to hold grudges. They realize that any sin-debt that anyone has ever compiled against them, is nothing compared to the sin-debt they have compiled against God!

That's the message of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. He owes his king ***"10,000 talents."*** And as R. T. France points out, ***"a talent was the highest unit of currency, and ten thousand was the highest Greek numeral,"*** or in other words, imagine the highest debt possible — a trillion dollars or more.

That conveys the sin-debt we have accumulated against God. And the King (who represents God) *“has pity on him”* (that is, on his inability to ever pay it back) and forgives it all! The entire trillion dollar debt erased completely!

Then that same man goes out, says Jesus, and finds a man who owes him *“a hundred denarii”* (or about \$5), and he grabs the man and starts choking him, because the man is unable to pay back the piddly five dollar debt!

So what's Jesus point? Hard as it is — and it is often extremely hard — we as Christians are to see ourselves as the forgiven servant in the parable, who, having such an enormous sin-debt wiped out (a debt so large it defies us to find a numeral big enough to describe it), has an obligation to then forgive all others for their lesser sin-debts against us.

In fact, that's the real sense of the petition we pray every time we pray the Lord's Prayer and say: *“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”* That is, *“Forgive us the enormous sin-debt that we have compiled against You, as we forgive the little sin-debts others have compiled against us by comparison.”* (\$1,000,000,000,000 / \$5)

That is the disposition that should characterize every Christian disciple — a forgiving spirit. Not all at once mind you! Forgiveness rarely comes easy. But it must eventually come if we are to display the mind and the heart of Christ who calls us to forgive the same person for the same sin seventy times seven!

Then **FOURTH**, Jesus tells us, *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap, for with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

The metaphor, says Leon Morris, is about *“measuring out grain in such a way as to ensure that full volume is given.”* One sat down, took their robe (which had a fold in the front used as a pocket), poured grain into it, then pressed it down, shook it until every space was filled, and then poured in a little more until it ran over into the lap (a Baker's dozen)!

That's Jesus way of saying, a disciple is not just to be giving; they are to be generous in their giving! They are to give as much as they are asked and more! *“For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”*

That is, the stingy giver will receive little in return, and the generous giver will receive much in return, for God loves to give to those who love to give, but begins to withhold from those who take and hoard and begin to keep all their blessings to themselves.

That's why one preacher I once heard suggested that God gave so much to **R.G. LeTourneau**, world famous inventor, engineering genius, designer of heavy-duty earth moving equipment, huge off-shore drilling platforms, the electric-drive wheel and founder of Letourneau College in Texas — because at one point he determined that giving the tithe (or 10% of his incomes was too little.

Instead he decided to give 90% to the Lord and live off 10% - investing millions of dollars in missionary development projects in Liberia, West Africa and Peru, South America, bringing the Gospel, education and medical aid to thousands, and then building a Christian College to train missionary pilots and others. God kept giving to him, because he kept giving it back to the Lord's work.

The same can be said for **H. P. Crowell**, founder of Quaker Oats, who could write in his later years, ***"For forty years I have given sixty to seventy percent of my income to God. But I have never gotten ahead of Him. He has always been ahead of me!"***

Yet even if you never get there (and I know generous people who have never become wealthy – being an engineering genius and having a business mind helps!), generosity should characterize your life, because you follow the one who gave His life, or gave everything He had to give, for you.

Then **LAST**, Jesus engages in a little humor to get His last point across! He says: ***"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, and pay no attention to the plank in your own?"***

Quite descriptive word-picture! A man, or a woman, slyly snooping around examining your ethical flaws that are the size of a little spec of sawdust, while he or she has this huge 2 x 10 plank protruding from their own eye! You can just see them, with this heavy board sticking out of their eye, and pulling their head to the side, trying to point out that you have a spec of dust in your eye! Like, "What's wrong with this picture??!!"

You see, Jesus funny picture is actually full of amazing insight. Because it suggests 2 things:

1st) The judgmental person is judgmental primarily because they lack self-knowledge. They quite literally do not know themselves well enough to perceive they have a

huge plank protruding from their eye!!! Which goes to show the old saying is true: "It's easier to see the faults of others than one's own faults."

2nd) Jesus is not teaching that the judgmental person simply has a plank sticking out of their eye in the general sense, but that the plank indicates they have a larger problem with the issue they judge others for than the person they are judging!

It has never ceased to amaze me that the most judgmental people are the ones who are habitually accusing others of being judgmental! The most negative and critical of people judge others for being critical. The most stubborn person is always accusing others of being stubborn! The cheapest of people accuse others of being cheap, and so forth and so on....!

Why? Because it takes one to know one! R. Kent Hughes is right when he states: "Judgmentalness is an unwitting revelation of one's own soul, because people rush to condemn their own sins in others."

He's right. Judgmentalness is an attempt to punish in others the sins we hate in ourselves. In fact, if people understood this principle there would be a lot less judging, for they would realize that every time they judge someone else it would be as if they were holding out a big sign that says: ***"Look at me! I have this same problem in an even bigger way!"*** Ooooppps!

In fact, that's basically what Jesus is saying, and Paul seems to repeat the same principle in Romans 2:1 where he writes (listen): ***"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on others, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."***

Which means what? Every time I find myself getting hot under the collar at someone, and judging them, I need to pause, consider what Scripture says, and admit (hard as it is) that I wouldn't be judging them unless I also struggled or was guilty of the same thing.

I need to pause, humbly thank God for pointing out one of my own flaws (by means of the anger I have toward others who do it), ask God to forgive me, and cease to say anything to that other person until the plank in my eye had been removed.

For to judge others for something I'm guilty of, is hypocrisy, says Jesus, and is not fitting for the disciple who seeks to display the character of Jesus!

Forgive us Lord...