

January 24, 2016

DO NOT JUDGE

Matthew 7:1-5

The Christian way is a way of mercy. *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy!"* (Matthew 5:7) First and foremost, we should be merciful, forgiving. We should not see ourselves as better than others, or, as morally superior – even though we may feel that way because we have experienced the justifying grace of God in Jesus Christ. The fact is, we are not perfect yet. We may be on the way, but we are still sinners. God is not finished with us yet.

So... we should never be judgmental.

Isaiah had a glorious vision. He described it in Isaiah Six – "I saw the Lord, seated on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the Temple. Above Him were the Seraphim... and they were calling to one another:

Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord Almighty!

The whole earth is full of His glory!

...The doorpost and the thresholds shook and the Temple was filled with smoke! And I cried out, 'Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!'" (1-5)

You see, at least for Isaiah; and, I believe it is true for us – an exalted vision of God brings a clear view of sin and a realistic view of self. On the other hand, a diminished view of God brings a reduced view of sin, and a distorted or inflated view of self – because we do not measure ourselves by a vision of standards beyond ourselves; our vision is limited only to what we want to think. We make up our own standards... and they often have little to do with God. Isaiah's encounter with God and His holiness made him immediately and keenly aware of his own unholiness, and, of the unholiness of those around him. *"Unclean lips!"*

So we need to see ourselves, and others, as desperately in need of mercy! Therefore, we should never be judgmental. (I believe, what is implied by Christ in this passage, when He says, *Do not judge*, is that we should not be judgmental. I will explain this in a little bit.) But... we need to realize that *"in the same way we judge others, we will be judged; and with the measure we use it will be measured to us."* (Matthew 7:2)

Be careful, here, though. A lot of people will shift into neutral because of this ethic, becoming way too lenient, hoping that God will, then, be lenient with them. No!!! God's justice does not work that way!

God's way, though merciful, is also holy! Righteous! We should never neglect holiness in favor of mercy, or, practice forgiveness at the expense of righteousness. So there's a paradox of justice. God has given us moral standards that we are all called to uphold. To loosen our hold on those standards is to relinquish our claim to God's mercy. That's why Jesus condemns hypocrisy. We cannot think about correcting others, without working on correcting ourselves. "First, take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly (enough) to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (7:5)

We should never be judgmental. And we should never be hypocritical! But realize that sometimes, our silence, our lenience, is a way of being naively complicit in the sins of others. Nearly being an accomplice. Leviticus 19:18 is the famous passage that contains the important instruction to *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”* But in the verse that immediately precedes that one, it tells us something almost overlooked, but very important as well: *Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.*” (v. 17b) Another version uses *reprove* instead of *rebuke*.

We may prefer being merciful, (even to the point of being lenient), but when we see someone headed into the darkness, and they need light, we need to say something. Being lenient never rescued anyone! Being complicit in their folly leaves us just as guilty as they are...simply because we should have warned them. We knew better, and we could have told them. I know that reproof and rebuke can turn people off, make them hate you... Solomon said so in his Proverbs... but, we must risk incurring their disdain for the sake of their righteousness. And, you need to use good judgment in discerning the way to rebuke or reprove someone. Sometimes, it will be tough love, and sometimes, it just needs to be a gentle nudge to remind someone of the standards we hold.

Let me give a few examples. It may sound like someone is being judged, but....appropriately so, there is a need for a good rebuking. A patron at a bar comes stumbling out of the bathroom and asks for one more drink... for the road. The bartender says to himself, and, maybe to others, “I know I shouldn’t judge,” and sells the man another drink, knowing that that last drink could easily further impair the man’s ability to drive safely. The bartender becomes complicit in whatever accident the man may cause.

How many sins have been allowed to be committed, we turned our heads, because “I-know-I-shouldn’t-judge?” *“Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt!”*

A fourteen-year-old girl speaks anxiously and eagerly about “going all the way” that night to a girlfriend. And the girlfriend simply says, “I know I shouldn’t judge. Be sure to use a condom.”

How lenient do we have to be before some kinds of risky behavior are spoken of as sinful? How willing are you to be complicit in the counter-productive actions, and thoughts, of others. We sacrifice more than the souls of others on the altar of “I-know-I-shouldn’t-judge,.” Our own souls are at stake as well.

James tells us, *“Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for them it is sin!”* (4:17)

Rebuke and reprove – it’s the right thing to do. Meanwhile, try not to be judgmental or hypocritical. Righteousness, not leniency. Holiness and mercy!

One last word... When we do rebuke someone and they point back at us and say, “You did it too! You’re a hypocrite! You shouldn’t judge!” Often we just shrug our shoulders and resign ourselves to the notion that “They will learn from their mistakes!” NO!!! People can learn from my mistakes. They can learn from your mistakes. People who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it!) George Santayana, 1863-1952)

Rebuking someone in their waywardness is a teachable moment. Help them learn! We sacrifice too many souls on the altar of “They-will-learn-from-their-mistakes.”

No! Be merciful, but not too lenient. Be wise, but not complicit. Be righteous, but not hypocritical. Be faithful. And call others to faith. Call sin Sin!

Proverbs 9:8 – Rebuke a scoffer and he will only hate you. The wise, when rebuked, will love you.
17:10 – A rebuke strikes deeper into a discerning person than a hundred blows into a fool.
27:5 – Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

One last passage: Ezekiel 33:7-9