

Judgement: To Judge Or Not To Judge
Sunday, February 18th, 2024, 10 a.m.

This morning I want to talk about judgment. I believe there is quite a bit of confusion about the various ways judgment is talked about throughout the Bible. And depending on what you want it to say, you can find a verse that defends your stance. For instance, if you want to stand on the street corner and unleash condemnation on passers-by you could read:

**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 - ...fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity.
[14] For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.**

Or maybe you'd prefer to use something from the New Testament. If that's the case, you'd probably go with something like:

Matthew 12:36 - I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak.

But oddly enough, the Bible also teaches against judgment. And so... as you're standing out on the street corner with your "Repent or Burn!" sign. Someone might walk up to you and quote verses like: Luke 6:37 or Matthew 7:1. Which both basically say, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged". But if we don't tell them, how will they know they need to repent? Surely we'll need to judge each other to do that, don't we? Is telling someone they need to repent, "judgement"? Alright we've got to start somewhere I don't want to just keep piling on questions.

Alright, to get started let me set some groundwork. When Jesus was explaining things and preparing his disciples for what life be like after He died, rose from the dead, and ascended to Heaven, and during that He was questioned: "Lord, how is it you're going to reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" And the way Jesus responded taught them—and shows us—that the way someone lives their life, shows whether or not they love God.

John 14:23-24 - Jesus answered, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. [24] The one who doesn't love me will not keep my words. The word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.

Someone who loves God, will do what His word says. In other words, there should be outward physical examples that align with their beliefs. The way they live, should match what they say they believe. It's similar to the way Jesus taught about avoiding false prophets and "wolves in sheep's clothing".

Matthew 7:15-20 - "Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. [16] You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? [17] In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. [18] A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. [19] Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20] So you'll recognize them by their fruit.

Both of those text teach that it is possible for us to recognize or notice when someone's fruit isn't matching. In verse 19 theres judgement for the tree that doesn't produce good fruit, it's cut down and thrown into the fire. Which is making an obvious connection to the false profits saying there will be judgement for those people. We don't like to hear this... you'd rather I just skipped passed this and move onto something that makes us all feel better. But like it or not, this isn't out of character for God. He has a standard, and He is just. If we don't live up to His standard, He couldn't just turn a blind eye... and pretend it didn't happen. That isn't God's character.

It's not any different from how it would feel to sit in front of a judge in our legal system, and to hear the evidence presented against the obviously guilty person accused of the crime. Only instead of hearing a guilty verdict be read by the judge, the judge just throws the case out and everyone just goes home like nothing happened. You'd expect the judge to be just, and do what needed to happen. And declare the accused person guilty of the crime they committed. Anything less than that would be a mockery of the courts.

Before Jesus, there was a very detailed Levitical sacrificial ceremony to cleanse the effects of sin. And Jesus fulfilled that system when He died on the cross. Paul writes to the Romans about this to try and explain things to them as well.

Romans 6:17-18; 22-23 - But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over, [18] and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness... [22] But now, since you have been set free from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification — and the outcome is eternal life! [23] For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Writing to the Roman church, to those who believe in, and follow Christ... for those who have repented of their sin, they are free from their sin, and the outcome is sanctification and eternal life. But he also says the wages of sin is death. Or the expected result for us should have been death, because of the sin in our lives. For someone who does not follow God's word and instead lives in sin, or lives based off their own desires will be judged justly.

Look at what else the Bible says about judgment.

2 Corinthians 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Acts 17:31 - "Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 - ...fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity. [14] For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

That's a lot about judgment. Which could be confusing, because we know there are verses in the Bible like the ones that I mentioned earlier that say, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged". How could there be all those verses about judgment, and then at the same time, verses saying, don't judge. Hopefully you noticed in all those verses I just read about judgment, who was doing the judging, "the judgment seat of Christ", "[God] is going to judge the world", "For God will bring every act to judgment". As Christians, it is never our place to play the role of judge.

James 4:11-12 - Don't criticize one another, brothers and sisters. Anyone who defames or judges a fellow believer defames and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. [12] There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour?

The word "lawgiver" is used six times in the Old Testament and only one time in the New Testament. The six times it is used in the Old Testament – refers only to God. And the same is true here too. Only God has a right to judge. It's not in your job description to judge other Christians. And it's definitely not your job to judge others outside the church. God has not created you to go around judging everybody you meet. James tells us more specifically not to criticize each other, because

when we do that, we're judging one another. Anytime I judge you, any time you judge me, that's stepping over the line. That's when we start playing God. It's only God's responsibility to judge people.

I'm not suggesting that by obeying what Scripture says about "not judging", that we're supposed to forget what the Bible says about sin. But, just keep that well-used-phrase in mind, "anytime you point at someone you have 3 fingers pointing back at yourself." None of us are perfect, everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's standard. That's the point Jesus is making at the end of the Sermon on the Mount when says in:

Matthew 7:1-6 - "Do not judge, so that you won't be judged. [2] For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use. [3] Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye but don't notice the beam of wood in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' and look, there's a beam of wood in your own eye?"

[5] Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's eye. [6] Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them under their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.

I imagine Jesus has the religious leaders of the time in mind when He's teaching this idea about judging others. We're supposed to be working towards getting sin, aka "the beam of wood" out of our own eye. We can/and should judge our own acts. What should be happening is, our own sins should seem worse in us... than the same sins seems when it's in the life of someone else. It's for this exact reason, Christians are quickly labeled as hypocrites. It's because we love pointing out the sins in others, while we ignore the sin in our own lives.

And then in verse 6 He changes his focus and all of a sudden starts talking about dogs, pigs and pearls. It's an odd and quick turn from what He was saying about being hypocrites in our judgement. And He starts making a new point. Verse 6 is referring specifically to judging/correcting/or rebuking the sin in the lives of people who don't even claim to believe in Jesus, and who don't follow the teaching throughout the Bible. That fact that Jesus says this, shows it's definitely not your job to judge others outside the church. We absolutely should be directing them to—and telling them about—Christ. It should be our goal to do everything in our power to show them the love of God. Our lives, should be a testimony for His compassion, mercy and grace that sinners like us can be redeemed and sanctified. But for us to judge them. For us to hold them to the standard of the Bible, before they ever recognize their need for a Saviour. That's when we step over the line and start playing God. Pigs don't recognize the beauty, and value of a pearl. To them, they think you're throwing a rock at them. If it's not food, they don't want it. And to someone living an unclean, or an un-holy life. They will be judged, and we absolutely need to warn them about that. But, if they already know that, rebuking someone for the sin in their life—someone who's hardened their heart toward God—that is going to have the opposite reaction you hope it would have. You want to judge them, and rebuke them, so that they would turn their life around. But more than likely having an attitude like that towards them, you are going to end up pushing them farther away, and do greater harm than good.

If you don't like what I just said. Or you think that I'm mistaken in my approach at understand the words Jesus was teaching when it comes to whether or not we're supposed to judge others. Maybe it will help if we look at what Jesus also said about this in:

John 12:44-50 - Jesus cried out, "The one who believes in me believes not in me, but in him who sent me. [45] And the one who sees me sees him who sent me. [46] I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me would not remain in darkness. [47] If anyone hears my words and doesn't keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world."

[48] The one who rejects me and doesn't receive my sayings has this as his judge: The word I have spoken will judge him on the last day. [49] For I have not spoken on my own, but the

Father himself who sent me has given me a command to say everything I have said. [50] I know that his command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me."

Before reading this. If I asked, "Since we aren't supposed to judge others. Who is responsible for judging?" You might quickly say "Jesus". And because Jesus is God incarnate, you'd technically be correct. However, while Jesus is 100% God, He was also 100% man. And the reason He first came to earth, was not to judge.

To the woman at the well who had multiple husbands, and the man she was currently with, wasn't her husband. Jesus doesn't "judge" her for that sin. We know that, because she didn't immediately receive the right and just punishment for her sin. What does He do? He points her to worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. There will come a time when Christ returns when final judgement takes place. But His role when He first came, is similar to our role. We don't play the role of Judge. Jesus could have... only because He was also 100% God. Look what Jesus says to the Pharisees about His role as judge later in:

John 8:15-16 - You judge by human standards. I judge no one. [16] And if I do judge, my judgment is true, because it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.

But for us, it's not our role. God knows our hearts. God knows what we're thinking. God knows our intentions. All we can respond to is someone's actions. Actions tell us things about someone. But we can't take the leap from responding to someone's actions, to judging their intent. I've been married to Amanda for almost 13 years. And although I know her better than most people. Even I can't assume her intent. If the coffee maker was left without water in it when she used it last. I can't make the judgment call that she did that on purpose. I can't know for sure if she did that on purpose to make me do it... or if she truly didn't notice that it needed to be filled after she used it. That's what Paul was getting at when he wrote in:

1 Corinthians 4:5a - So don't judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes, who will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts...

Alright. I hope by now I've made my point. But what do we do with this? How do we stop judging others? Let me give you three quick ideas about how to stop judging others. The first one is:

Remember you will be judged by the same standards you judge others with.

Matthew 7:1-2 - "Do not judge, so that you won't be judged. [2] For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use.

The standards we use—if we judge others—will be used against us as well. And since we will be judged in the same way that we judge others, many of us are in trouble! If you want to break the habit of talking bad about people, and judging others just remember that what you dish out... is what you are going to get in return. The next idea is:

Remember You Are Accountable To God

Romans 14:12-13a - So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. [13] Therefore, let us no longer judge one another...

You are accountable to God. He is the ultimate judge. He is the One that all of us will bow our knees before. You and I will be accountable for every action and every word that we have ever spoken. Every good word, and every bad word.

Matthew 12:36-37 - I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. [37] For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

How is God going to judge? He is going to judge honestly, fairly, and truthfully. His judgment will be based on hard cold facts. He will judge with justice. And my last idea is this:

Remember God Has Been Merciful To you

James 2:13 - For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

God is merciful. He gives forgiveness where there should be condemnation. Shouldn't we act the same way? Do you remember the story that Jesus told in Matthew 18? It goes something like this:

A man owed 10,000 talents to his boss. Depending on what I've read 1 talent was either representative of the weight of a person in silver. So 10,000 talents of silver would be over half a billion dollars. Or I've also read 1 talent was as much as 20 years wages. The average Ontario salary multiplied by 20, and then by 10,000 is almost 11 billion dollars. Regardless of the exact amount the point of the parable was that the debt would never be able to be repaid. And yet, his boss was kind enough to forgive him of that massive debt. Right away that man then went out and found a guy who owed him 100 denarii, or 100 days wages. Today in Ontario at minimum wage before taxes we're talking just over \$13,000. And he strangled the guy because he wouldn't pay up. When the boss heard the news... He went to man who used to owe him billions and said, "Who do you think you are? I forgave you a huge amount. This other guy only owed you a little bit... shouldn't you shown mercy to him like the mercy you received?"

God has shown us mercy. God has shown us love. God has shown us forgiveness. How should we treat those who are around us? He doesn't want us throwing our weight around, judging and criticizing others. Because we can only judge by human standards. We do need to warn the world because God will be the judge. In the things we say and do, we absolutely should be directing them to—and specifically telling them about—Christ. It should be our goal to do everything in our power to show them the love of God. Our lives, should be a testimony for His compassion, mercy and grace... that sinners like us can be redeemed and sanctified.