

SUNDAY, JANUARY 24, 2010

## Sunday, January 24, 2010: Judging Judgmentalism

Judging Judgmentalism  
Matthew 7: 1 – 6.

### I. Introduction.

Two events happened this past week that cast Christians in a bad light. The first took place when TV evangelist Pat Robertson attempted to interpret the Haitian earthquake as God's judgment on Haiti. Robertson claims that in the 1700's the Haitian people were being held as slaves to the French. In order to escape their slave masters, the people made a "pact with the devil." They would worship the devil if he would rescue them from slavery.

If you subscribe to Jim Denison's daily email devotional, you probably know that he wrote about this "pact with the devil" four days last week. If you want to learn more of the "facts" behind this, you can read his archived devotionals at <http://www.godissues.com>. Suffice it to say, there is no historical evidence that such a "pact with the devil" ever took place. Also, it seems problematic to me that if the devil freed the Haitian slaves, then God is on the side of the oppressors and Satan is on the side of freedom.

This isn't the first time Pat Robertson has made outrageous claims about disasters and God's judgment. He said the same thing about Hurricane Katrina and the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. He said September 11 was God's judgment on the United States for our approval of homosexuality and abortion. He claimed Hurricane Katrina was God's judgment on the wickedness of New Orleans. In both of these cases, it seems that God "missed." September 11 had little affect on homosexuality in the United States, and Bourbon Street in New Orleans is in the section of the city least affected by Hurricane Katrina. (Bourbon Street is one of the few areas of New Orleans built above sea level.)

The second event took place in the McLennan County Courthouse in Waco, Texas. A pastor—with whom I went to seminary—was convicted of killing his wife and making it look like a suicide. Every day of testimony, the Waco Tribune Herald posted a live blog on their website (<http://www.wacotrib.com>) from inside the courtroom. So, at least once a day, I read summaries of all the testimony and proceedings.

If you are familiar with the way the blogosphere operates, you know it is an interactive experience. You don't just read the written posts. You can add your "two cents worth" in the comments section. You will be glad to know that I did not post any comments last week. But, I did read some of the comments.

Most people wrote comments about their opinions of the case or of their relationship with the defendant and his wife. However, there were some comments of a theological nature. Some people projected this pastor's actions onto all pastors or even onto all Christians. These people expressed their view that all Christians are hypocrites—claiming to believe in love and forgiveness and living like Jesus, but actually living secret lives. Non-Christians accuse us of expecting them to live a lifestyle that we are unwilling and unable to live ourselves.

Our response to these events is to claim that not all Christians are like Pat Robertson or the pastor

in Waco. Or, we insist that the world should stop judging all Christians by the conduct of a few.

But, perhaps we deserve the criticism and judgmentalism. After all, Christians can be some of the most difficult people to be around when life is falling apart. Would you rather talk to your friends at work or your friends at church when you find out that your son is in jail or your daughter is pregnant? Sometimes the friends at work are more likely to be supportive and less likely to be judgmental.

This was not God's intent for the church. This is not what Jesus had in mind when he preached his Sermon on the Mount.

### **Read Matthew 7: 1 – 6.**

We are coming to the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has taught us about character and ethical behavior. The followers of Jesus are supposed to be different in character from the rest of the world. We are to live like salt and light in an unsavory and dark world. Then, we are supposed to live out our character in unique ethical behavior. For example, Christians are to move the boundary between sin and obedience from the body to the heart. It is not enough to resist killing another person—Christians must remove the hatred from our hearts. It is not enough to resist committing adultery—Christians must remove the lust from our minds.

Now, Jesus turns his attention to our relationships with others. I believe this includes our relationships inside the church as well as outside the church. Very simply, Jesus said we should remove judgmentalism from our lives. He gave us a command, a warning and two parables about judgmentalism.

### **II. A Command: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged (verse 1).**

The words "do not judge" are written as a command from Jesus to his followers. It is a very simple command—at least it is simple grammatically. It is a much more difficult command when we take seriously what Jesus commands us to do.

Grammatically, Jesus' words are a present imperative. Imperative means it is a command. The present tense indicates continuous action. There are two ways to translate Jesus' words. Either, "Do not judge;" or "Stop Judging."

Judgment is a way of life for most people. In fact, we can argue a case for our mental capability to judge as one way we were created in the image of God. The animal kingdom does not have the kind of reasoning abilities found in the human mind. Every day human beings make decisions about right and wrong, obedience and sin, life and death. Animals are too preoccupied with matters of food, shelter and reproduction to be concerned with things like right and wrong or obedience and sin. If we obey this command to stop judging, we might cease to be human and become more like the animals.

However, since these words come as a commandment from Jesus, they are a call to live a higher form of human life. This is a matter of obedience and not a return to animalistic instinct. This tells me that Jesus has something different in mind than simply choosing between right and wrong or obedience and sin. Instead of judging between right and wrong, Jesus is telling us not to judge people.

As human beings, we have been created in the image of God. Our lives are to be a reflection of God, just as the moon is a reflection of the sun. We are to reflect God's character in the way we live our lives. We are to reflect God's love in the way we love other people. We are to reflect God's grace in the way we extend grace to others. We were created in the image of God...BUT...We were not created to be God. That job is already filled.

Any time a human being places himself or herself in a position to judge another person, that person is claiming to be God. The problem with this is that we are not qualified to sit in judgment. God is sinless and without fault. Therefore, God is qualified to be our judge. I am not sinless and without fault. Therefore, I am one of the judged and not the judge.

Followers of Jesus are supposed to be good judges of right and wrong and obedience and sin. However, we are not to be fault-finders and critical of the shortcomings of others. God sees the motives in a person's heart. We do not.

### **III. A Warning: For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (verse 2).**

After giving us a simple command, Jesus gives us a warning: you will be judged in the same way you judge others.

There are two ways to interpret the passive voice of Jesus' warning. On one hand, Jesus could be warning us that other people will judge us in the same way we judge them. On the other hand, this could be another example of a "divine passive." In other words, you will be judged by God in the same way you judge other people.

If this is a "divine passive," then this verse seems to parallel Jesus' teaching about forgiveness in the Model Prayer. In **Matthew 6: 12**, Jesus taught us to pray, "**Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**" Then, in **verse 14**, Jesus said, "**For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.**"

There is a close connection between our forgiveness and our willingness to forgive others. Also, there is a close connection between the way God judges us and the way we judge others.

I don't subscribe to a legalistic view of either forgiveness or judgment. In fact, Jesus has been preaching against the legalism of the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law. They are legalistic. And, Jesus does not want us to be like them. He wants us to be different. He wants us to be gracious and forgiving and non-judgmental. Perhaps the relationship is more like this... A person who has been forgiven by God knows how to forgive other people... A person who has experienced grace knows how to be gracious... A person who knows that God is my judge is non-judgmental toward others...

### **IV. A Parable: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye (verses 3 – 5).**

This is one of several parables that I think people laughed at when Jesus first spoke it. It is a caricature. It is hyperbole. It is a little bit silly. Imagine what a person would look like with a giant log stuck in their eye! It's an impossible scenario. Logs and planks don't get stuck in your eye. Well, if a log did get stuck in your eye...you should seek medical attention immediately. You have a big problem.

Perhaps that is the point Jesus is making. Get help for your own imperfections before you start looking for imperfections in other people. None of us can take the plank out of our own eye. We can't forgive our own sins. We can't remove temptations from our lives. But we think we can remove "specks" from someone else's eye.

In verse five, Jesus used the word "hypocrite" again. A hypocrite is an actor, who wears a mask to pretend to be someone he is not. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned us not to give financial gifts like hypocrites, not to pray like hypocrites and not to fast like hypocrites. Giving, praying and fasting are righteous acts that should be done before God and not other people. We are not supposed to do good deeds so other people can see us and congratulate us.

In this context, "hypocrite" has the same meaning. It is an actor, a pretender, someone who is wearing a mask to hide their true character. Have you ever thought of judgmentalism as a hypocritical act? Jesus says it is. Any time we try to remove a tiny speck from someone else's eye (or life) we are pretending that we don't have any specks or logs in our own eye (or life).

#### **V. Another Parable: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces (verse 6).**

This is a strange parable. Its truth is fairly obvious. Dogs and pigs would rather have food than anything else. If you give something holy to a dog, it might get mad when it discovers it is not food. If you give pearls to pigs, they will trample them when they discover they cannot be eaten. That much is true. But, what does this mean?

The terms "dog" and "pig" are significant here. Ancient Jews often referred to Gentiles as "dogs." First Century residents of Israel referred to their Roman occupiers as "pigs." "Dogs" and "pigs" were derogatory terms for outsiders.

In verse 5, Jesus used the word "brother." This is a word the New Testament uses to describe other Christians—people who are also members of the church. It refers to insiders, not outsiders.

#### **VI. Conclusion (Matthew 18: 10 – 35).**

In Matthew 18, there is a teaching of Jesus which has been interpreted by many as a four step process for church discipline. In other words, it is a process to follow in order to "kick someone out of your church." And this is what I always thought it was, until I actually read it:

**"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**

**(Matthew 18: 15 – 17).”**

Two things about this passage make it difficult for me to think of it as a process for church discipline.

First, notice the context. This teaching falls in between two parables. The first parable is about a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep safe in the pen to find one lost sheep. The second parable is about a slave who receives mercy from his master and immediately shows no mercy to others. This entire context is a teaching about showing mercy to a fellow Christian and seeking a lost brother.

Second, notice how Jesus ended his teaching in verse 17: “treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” Jesus never used the phrase, “cast them out,” or “send them away” or “kick them out of the church.” Jesus said, “treat them like pagans and tax collectors.” How did Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors? Jesus loved pagans and tax collectors. Jesus reached out to them. Jesus ate supper with them. Jesus made them disciples! (We think Matthew himself was a tax collector!)

I think if we understand what Jesus said about dogs and pigs, we will understand what he was saying about judgmentalism. For example, judgmentalism is always wrong—both inside the church and outside the church. However, it is acceptable for one Christian brother to help another Christian brother. First, take your own sins and faults to Jesus for forgiveness. Then, extend forgiveness to your brother as you restore him or her.

However, if someone will not accept the grace and forgiveness of Christ, then they will certainly not accept your attempts to correct their behavior. Correcting a non-Christian is as foolish as giving something holy to a dog or giving pearls to pigs.