

12. Simple Commands to stop judging

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Christians have a lot of indoor games they play. One of the most popular ones is "Let's Judge." Here's how it works. We find those who are different than we are – they may look different, sound different, think different, or act different, of course they may not as well to do as we are - then we start the game, which is played in steps.

First step: We find something about them we don't like. I mean anything.

Second step: We examine the externals only, forget about what are inside of that person. They couldn't be as spiritual as we are.

Third step: We form critical opinions that should be facts to everyone, since we came up with.

Fourth step: We jump to inaccurate conclusions.

Fifth step: We stick a label on them.

Sixth step: We share our findings with others within our clique.

The winner gets to wear a smugly superior look for the rest of the day, weeks, months and even years.

Let's think about this "Let's Judge" game. It's wrong. Why is it so wrong? Because we are never able to know all the unknown facts and hidden motives. And, because of these, we are never able to be completely free of prejudice. But most importantly, because such judging is disobeying the clear command of Christ.

A. UNDERSTANDING THE COMMAND

Matthew 7:1 "Judge not"

This is the verse that has been used often by those who are in sin. When they were confronted by brothers and sisters in the Lord who care enough to confront them in love, they bring up this verse to defend their ongoing sins.

The word judge is from the Greek word "krino," which means "'to distinguish" or "to decide." To be able to judge truth from error is a mark of maturity and is not what Jesus is prohibiting. For proof of this, take a look at what He says in verse 6:

Matthew 7:6 Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

If you skip down to verse 15, you'll see that Jesus also tells us to use discernment in exposing false prophets. Elsewhere, He demands that we make right judgments.

And if we turn to Paul's letters, we'll find that he, too, exhorts us to use discernment.

John 7:24 Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.

Galatians 1:6-9 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different Gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

Philippians 3:2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

1 John 4:1 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.

Some judging, therefore, is not only acceptable, but it is mandated. We are never expected to suspend our cautious spiritual evaluation capabilities or turn a blind eye to error.

The Christian is called to unconditionally love. But the Christian is not called to unconditional approval. We really can love people who do things that should not be approved of.

Then what does Jesus mean in verse 1? Quite simply, He wants us to not be highly critical for the sake of criticism, to not conduct our lives with a judgmental or negative attitude, to not assess others suspiciously, to not find petty faults or seek out periodic failures. Simply, we are not to go around as sin sniffers or self-appointed Holy Spirit death squad.

People with prejudice and legalism are the perfect candidate as sin sniffers who think that it is God given authority and job for them to go around and check out how the people around them are living and criticize. In most cases, they cannot live up to their own standards.

If we think that we are better than other people because we know more Bible verses than others or financially better, we are sadly mistaken in our stupidity. Because God is not impressed with what we know or what we have. As a matter of fact, He is not impressed with any one of us at all.

When Jesus spoke like this, as so often in the Sermon on the Mount, He was using words and ideas which were quite familiar to the highest thoughts of the Jews. Many a time the Rabbis warned people against judging others. "He who judges his neighbor favorably, will be judged favorably by God."

When we pass judgment on others, we assume the role of our ultimate Judge God Almighty, suggesting that we are Lord and others are our servants. The Scriptures, however, specifically condemn this superior, condescending attitude.

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

B. WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND

Matthew 7:1-2 "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

If we are harsh in dishing out judgment to others, judgment will be harshly dished out to us in return. If, however, we are gracious and forgiving, we can expect to be treated that way ourselves.

Matthew 7:3-4 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 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?

The Greek word for 'speck' is "karphos." It refers to a little, irritating particle, so tiny it almost cannot be seen. The Greek word for 'plank' is dokos, referring to a beam of timber. I am sure that this Jesus' humorous illustration brought a good laugh from the listeners who had been judged by the Pharisees.

Jesus doesn't say that it's wrong to help a brother or sister get a speck out of his or her spiritual eye. However, He does say that it is inappropriate to attempt to do so when there's a plank stuck in our own.

Jesus calls that person a hypocrite, a rebuke so strong that He used it in decrying the character of the Pharisees.

C. YOU ARE THE MAN

Most people know the tragic story of David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. Not as many know the story that followed. Rather than confess his moral failure to God, David attempted to cover it. He called Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, from the battlefield and sent him home in hopes that he would sleep with his wife and thus think that he had been the one to get her pregnant. But the plan backfired. Uriah's loyalty as a soldier kept him from finding pleasure the arms of his wife while the battle still raged. So to cover his adulterous tracks, David arranged for Uriah's murder. Months afterward, it seemed he had gotten away with that crime. Until the prophet Nathan confronted the king with a parable.

2 Samuel 12:1-4 Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

With the planks of adultery, murder, and deception sticking out of his eye, David passed judgment with fervor and conviction. God put David at the exact place He wants to be. It is the time to draw the net.

2 Sam 12:5-7a So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Nathan jabbed his long index finger to David's breast bone and declared him guilty.

D. APPLYING THE REPROOF

Whom was Jesus speaking to? Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees and lawyers and those who hid behind their religious masks and condemn others in their measurement that they don't even follow.

Matthew 7:5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Many have erroneously concluded from this passage that we're not to interfere in other people's lives, that we're to mind our own business, to live and let live and leave the specks alone. God tells us differently.

Notice the words 'first' and 'then.' We have to get rid of the planks in our own eyes before we are qualified to retrieve the specks from eyes of others. This idea is supported by Paul in Galatians 6:1.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

The word 'restore' comes from the Greek word "katarizo." It means "put back in what's missing." The word is used for setting a broken bone.

Paul is saying, "you who are *spiritual*" who have removed the planks from your own eyes – you be the ones to be the agents of healing, you be the ones to set the broken bones, but with utmost tenderness and compassion."

As we reach into that person's eye to remove the speck, let's remember several things:

- 1) Be sure our own hands and heart are clean.
- 2) Eyes with specks in them are tender, so let's be sensitive and careful.
- 3) We are dealing with a family member, a brother or sister in Christ.

How do I know if I am judging that is condemning them? If I choose not to get involved with the lives of those who are sinning and help them to be restored into Christ, but just passing my opinion. Then I am judging them with condemnation.

E. APPLICATIONS

Playing the "Let's Judge" game is addictive and destructive, both to the person who gets judged and to the person who does the judging. If we're not careful, judging can become so much a part of us that we're hardly aware we're doing it. Eventually, it comes so distasteful that people begin to distance themselves from us.

Here is how we can overcome this judging attitude:

1) Let's examine ourselves before ever examining anyone else.

Let's be more thorough with ourselves than we are with others.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

2) Let's understand that person's struggles and be gentle in confronting.

That's what Paul means in Galatians 6:1 when he says to restore "in a spirit of gentleness."

3) Let's be careful, because with the measure we use, we will be measured.

Let's learn to be discreet in our conversations about our confrontations with others. Don't broadcast in public what's been confessed to us in private.

4) Let's remember that the goal is restoration, not probation.

The goal is not to prolong the pain of brokenness but to set the bone so that it will heal as soon as possible. That's the only way it will ever be useful again to the body by being healed and restored. And once they are restored, we shouldn't continuously remind their failures. Nor should we stand looking over their shoulder to make they don't slip and fall again. Instead, we give our affirmation to them, so that they can look to the road ahead.