

JUDGE NOT, LEST...

"*Judge not, lest ye be judged.*" Best said with invective inflection and pointed finger. It seems everyone knows this verse, especially the 1611 King James Version. It's often used to level righteous indignation against anyone who might dare question words, actions, or attitudes.

Jesus said it in Luke 6:24-38. But what did He mean? It's part of Christ's teaching that is also in Matthew 5-7 in the sermon on the mount. He's speaking specifically to His disciples, those who have made a commitment to follow Him in order to become like Him.

GOLDEN RULE - Jesus said in v31, "*As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*" Christ's command "*to love one another*" was accompanied with His command not just to love your neighbor as yourself, but even your enemies as yourself. This "law of Christ" is greater than the "law of Moses" (Exodus 20). Both are impossible to keep.

That's why God had promised new hearts, and the indwelling Holy Spirit in the New Covenant. That age has now come, Jesus announces, as He describes what His followers are to be like, as they repent and believe the gospel of the kingdom, receiving Him as Christ, Lord, Savior.

UNTO OTHERS - In v36 Jesus said, "*Be merciful, even as your heavenly Father is merciful.*" This is more outworking in the disciple's life, to reflect the heart of God as we live in His kingdom under His reign and rule. In complete dependence upon Him, by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Jesus goes further in v37-38, "*Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*" Do to others as you want them to do to you.

You don't want to be judged, condemned, or unforgiven? Then be merciful to others, so they will be merciful to you. We get the big picture, but the details nag us. We see the gray areas.

BE MERCIFUL - Mercy is a character quality of God, and therefore of His Son, Jesus Christ, and therefore it is to be a character quality of His disciples. Jesus expresses mercy when He says bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you, give to those who take advantage (remembering the caveat, in previous columns, that this does not preclude self-defense).

Mercy is not only in words, but also actions and attitudes. "The spirit of discipleship involves the disposition and spirituality of a devoted follower of Christ," notes theologian RK Hughes. "This goes beyond externals to the very heart of discipleship. No mere outward imitation here, but true Christianity is from the inside out." It's driven by the power of the Holy Spirit.

GOD'S MERCY - The basis for our mercy for others is God's mercy toward us. Micah 7:18 says, "*Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness and steadfast love, as You have sworn.*"

Mercy is God not giving what you deserve, as He pardons sin. Grace is God giving what you don't deserve, as He gives the righteousness of Christ to those who receive Him. So when Jesus says "*judge not, and you will not be judged*" what does this mean in the context of mercy?

CONDEMN NOT - "Judge" is used 114 times in the New Testament, including Matthew 7:1-2 where Jesus adds, "*for with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.*" Context adds clarity to the meaning.

Theologian RC Sproul notes different kinds of "judging" in Scripture. The judging of "discernment" qualitatively understands the difference between good and evil. The judging of "condemnation" is when one acts as judge and jury, passing judgment on the guilt of others, critically consigning them to hell. Followers of Christ must exercise discernment and equanimity (for next week).

But to judge in condemnation is reserved for God alone, who knows the heart. Of course, courts of law pass judgment according to laws of the land. Evil, unrighteousness, corruption, criminality and terrorism must be discerned and dealt with, so we have a functioning society. But we commit the souls of others to God. He is the ultimate judge, all-knowing, perfectly righteous! ☐