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Presentation Transcript
Judging Others
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Today we're going to talk about judging others, but first, let me ask you this: Does the Bible ever contradict itself? Well, we, of course, believe that it doesn't. We believe that it's perfect. And I know, because it's an old book, because it's hard to understand, because Christians have not always lived a good example for non-believers, because there's self-will in the human heart, and therefore a bias against obedience to God, some people don't believe that it's perfect. That's okay. It's not my truth. We're all going to learn which way it is, one way or the other, at some point, so there's no need to argue about it. We can just wait. But we will stake out our position for discussion's sake today.

Let's look at two scriptures. The first is in John 7:24.

John 7:24 – *Do not judge by appearances, but judge with righteous judgment.*

There's one. Now let's look at another: Matthew 7:1.

Matthew 7:1 – *Judge not that you be not judged.*

So which way is it? Should we judge others or not? Well, today we're going to look at the biblical position regarding judgment of other people and also explain why it's important to follow the biblical position, not only for our spiritual well-being, but also for our mental health's sake.

Let's go back and look first at Matthew 7 – “Judge not that you be not judged.” If you look at that verse, the word *judge* there, from the Louw & Nida *Lexicon*, means – the Greek word is *krino* – to judge; decide; prefer; evaluate; hold a view; make a legal decision; condemn; rule (as in “make a ruling,” like a judge would) – quite a variety of meaning from one word. But which one applies? Well, to know what it really means in context is the thing. So let's look at it in context.

“Judge not that you be not judged” – Matthew 7:1. Verse 2:

V-2 – For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Reading a few more verses, then, we see Jesus is talking about making a negative moral judgment about somebody else – condemnation, in other words. He tells us that, if we do that, God will judge us, using the same measurement that we apply to other people. He then tells us we ought, however, to judge ourselves – that is, in an unbiased fashion, we ought to face our own sins – unpleasant as that always is.

Let’s ask this question: Why will we be judged the way we judge? Why does God operate this way? Well, there are several reasons. One is that He’s fair.

I was watching the acclaimed video series about World War II, *Band of Brothers*, recently. At one point, the 101st Airborne was pinned down on the Ardennes Forest, near Bastogne, Belgium, during the winter. It was a terrific standoff – no winter clothing, outside day and night, sleeping in holes in the ground, low on ammunition, periodic artillery bombardment. To make things even more intolerable, Easy Company had a commander who was worthless. His men were afraid he was going to get them killed. He spent his time taking walks and deferring leadership to those under him. His superior officer knew what was going on, but he couldn’t do anything about it, because the worthless commander was placed in his position by the higher ups – obviously favored by someone up the command structure. He was probably there to get some combat experience before favoritism sent him up the chain of command, no matter how poor his performance in the field.

God is not like that. He’s fair. We’re all judged by the same yardstick – rich or poor, powerful or weak, connected or alone. And that yardstick is tempered with the grace of God with one exception. When we begin condemning others, then the mercy God might have extended is withdrawn and we are judged by our own yardstick.

But why does God do that? Why does He judge us the way we would judge others? We said there were several reasons. The first was that God is fair. Here’s the second: God is the judge; we are not. The role of judge is the role He has claimed for His own. When we condemn others, we are usurping God’s authority.

Why doesn’t God let us judge? Well, because we don’t have as many facts as He has. We’re not equipped. We can’t read the heart. Our job is to learn how to follow God, rather than deciding if others are following God or not.

Here’s a third reason: If we’re condemning others, it means that we don’t see our own sins. Let’s read more – Matthew 7:3:

Matthew 7:3 – *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eyes when there's a log in your own eye." You hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

Why is it important to see our own sins? If we can't see our own sins, then we don't see all the grace that is ours to receive and our profound need for it. And that means we can't be properly appreciative for what God has done for us. We judge with a gigantic blind spot if we're in that situation. It can be summed up by the statement, "I? I would never do something like that!" which makes us unfit to judge, because, if we don't see our own mercy, we can't very well extend it to others as would God. To contrast, turn that around and see how it feels. "I? I do things just as bad as that all the time. I know how it feels to need mercy and forgiveness." Quite a difference, isn't there?

Here's a scripture that punctuates it with an exclamation point. It's in James 2:13.

James 2:13 – *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.* Beautiful scripture!

Let's move now to the second scripture in John 7:24.

John 7:24 – *Do not judge by appearances, but judge with righteous judgment.*

The word there for *judge* is the same word – *krino*. So it sounds like a contradiction, doesn't it? But it's not. Actually, it's showing us how *not* to condemn others. Let's look at the context, as we did in the first scripture.

V-21 – *Jesus answered them* – there were some people taking Him to task about a healing that He performed on the Sabbath – *"I did one work and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I make a man's body whole? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with righteous judgment."*

So He's in this discussion with this group of people who are condemning Him for healing a man on the Sabbath. And He reminds them that they customarily circumcised people on the Sabbath. If they understood the mercy of the law of God, they would be able to see that it would be okay to heal somebody as well. And then He generalizes and tells them to look more deeply into the situation to understand.

When we follow Jesus' command to judge not, that doesn't mean we have no opinion or understanding. It simply means we don't condemn other people. We leave that to God. To understand more deeply, look at this scripture with me in John 8, beginning in verse 2.

John 8:2 – *Early in the morning, He came again to the temple. And all the people came to Him, and He sat down and taught them.* By the way, this is, in all probability, the Eighth Day of the Feast of Tabernacles. That day stands for the judgment of God. If you read chapter 7, you can see it. There was a water festival for seven days of the eight-day festival. He preached about water on that day. Yet here He is in the temple the next day, teaching about judgment. Let's pick it up in verse 3.

V-3 – *The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and placed her in the midst. And they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now the law of Moses commanded us to stone such a woman, so what do You say?" This they said to test Him, that they might have some charge to bring against Him. And Jesus bent down and wrote with His finger on the ground, and as they continued to ask Him, He stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more He bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they all went away, one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before Him.*

Do you see what happened? Once they started thinking about their own sins, instead of hers, they backed off. When we see someone who is in a rage of condemnation, we're looking at someone who has forgotten – or has never seen – his own sins. Then notice what happens next, beginning in verse 10.

V-10 – *Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" And she said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, sin no more."*

So the word here for *condemned* is the more narrow term than *krino*. It is *katakrino*. And it means *to pass judgment*. Jesus wasn't pretending that she didn't have any sins, nor was He naïve to her sins. He *knew* that she had sinned, but remember that *krino* can mean not only to pass judgment, but also to decide, evaluate, or hold a view – which He did, but He refused to pass judgment, or condemn her, or look down on her. And then He told her to go and sin no more. He wasn't going to condemn because He didn't want to usurp God's role. We know that when we are judged, Jesus will be the One who judges us, but He had not yet, at that time, become our judge, because He was not yet resurrected and glorified. And neither are we. So we are to look at the examples around us – good and bad – we are to discern what people do – good or bad – we are to understand them in light of our tendencies to sin also. We're to understand deeper motives – our own and those of others. Otherwise, we would be spiritually naïve and subject to deception. Want a really good example of that? Let's go to 2 Timothy 4:3.

2 Timothy 4:3 – *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

Years ago, there was a ventriloquist, named Edgar Bergin – his daughter actually became much more famous than he – at least, in our time – Candice Bergin was his daughter – and Edgar Bergin had a dummy, named Charlie McCarthy and then another one, named Mortimer Snerd. Mortimer was very naïve. He would always say, “Yup, yup, yup” to just about anything. But one time there was an exchange between Charlie and Mortimer. Charlie said, “Mortimer, I can’t believe you’re so naïve!” And Mortimer said, “Force yourself.” So a lot of Christians are kind of like Mortimer – you know, naïve about what’s going on.

When someone enters into your congregation and starts preaching things that are *not* what your congregation believes, they usually have a motive for it. Are you naïve to that? Or can you see what it is? Usually, they’re trying to pull away a following of their own. Look at what Paul says to us in Romans 16, verses 17 and 18.

Romans 16:17-18 – *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions, and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught, and avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites – or passions – and by smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the naïve. For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.* We are not supposed to be spiritual Mortimer Snerds.

Can you recognize that? Have you ever seen that happen in your congregation? Or are you naïve? Does it all sound good to you? Well, if people have different ideas, they should go out from your group and found another, rather than sowing discord in your group. Now, if they want to come and participate, and be quiet about what they believe, that’s fine. But why is there a need, with some people, to have a following? Is it money? Well, that usually figures into it. But look deeper. What else could it be? Well, when you get to self-exaltation, then you’re down to it. And this leads us to the mental health piece I was mentioning in the beginning.

Why do people do what they do? The best way to understand that is to understand ourselves – like what we were talking about relating to judging. Why are we judgmental? Well, most of the time, it’s because we don’t see, or don’t *want* to see, our sins. Why don’t we want to see our own sins? Because we already feel bad enough about ourselves. We just want to feel good. There’s a simple solution for all that. And it’s to obey God. And then you won’t have to feel bad. But that’s too hard, so we settle for pumping ourselves up, denying our faults, and projecting them on to others. “I? I would never do something like that! But you, on the other hand, are the devil’s swan!” Or we think that, if we can gain a

following, that gives credence to us as a person. “Look what I have accomplished. I must be okay.”

You think I’m over simplifying it? Spiritual and mental health are very much similar. Think how good the bullied and brow-beaten little Adolf felt after he became the Chancellor of Germany. He had a following and power to assuage his beleaguered sense of self. Once you understand it, a good bit of the evil in the world comes from shame – from learning early that we are, somehow, defective and trying to prove to ourselves and others that we are not, but without the grace of God. Adolf probably felt good right up until he saw that he’d painted himself into a corner that required his suicide.

We’ve been talking, over the last year, about developing a faith story – a rich story of *who* we are, *how* God has dealt with us. That story includes how we came to be as we are, with all our strengths and weaknesses, successes and failings. If we do a good job of that, we will learn several things that will help us to be a lot less condemning of other people and more merciful.

Some time back I gave a presentation on how to forgive, which is very closely connected to this topic. I gave an example of a man who had been angry with his mother all his life. He thought she didn’t love him. Once he faced the reality of his mother’s situation, from an adult perspective, he saw that she did, in fact, love him deeply, and put herself in harm’s way many times to protect him. Once he realized this, all the rejection he felt melted away, as did his anger for her. He found himself no longer hurting and he realized he was no longer condemning her. His depression and anxiety began to lift.

What we can learn from this is that condemnation often comes from the pain of loss somehow. Now I’m not saying that the hurts of the past are an excuse for condemning others, but they can show us the reason for it. Once we *see* people who are judgmental as wounded, then it’s easier to let go of it – to be non-judgmental ourselves. God’s way is a good way. So lighten up! Ease off. Relax. Stop being so hard on other people and on yourself. We’re all in God’s hands. He will work everything out for those who follow Him if we just let Him. Doesn’t that sound good? To relax and quiet the mind, to stop the anxiety, the hatred, the judgment? To do that we need to understand that we’re not responsible for others – just ourselves. And we need to work on our faith story, so we can know *how* God has already worked in our lives and has taken care of us in the past.

Well, that’s it for today. Check back in two weeks for more. And don’t forget to look at our Website where you can find all our resources. Until next time, chill out, relax. People will find you easier to be around.