

6-13 **Where Non-Christians Are Judged** **John 8:12-18; 1 Cor. 4:1-5**

One Baptist leader quipped that Baptists tend to form their firing squads in a circle. There are only losers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said that Christians are the only soldiers in the world that shoot their wounded. The military has an oxymoron for this. It's called "killed by friendly fire."

Hear the words of Jesus in Luke 6; ³⁷"*Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*"

Where skeptics never go and why is the title of this sermon series. We are addressing the biggest reasons skeptics won't set foot in a church. Last week, we considered how many refuse Christ and faith because they think in so doing they must also reject the findings of science.

This week, it gets more personal because all of us are guilty of pushing unbelievers away by this attitude and behavior. I'm speaking of judging others; of pronouncing condemnation on sinners. It shouldn't be surprising that those so judged cannot hear our gospel.

We are not going to look at judgments we make about right and wrong in the church. **The focus today is on judgment we direct at the sin of the world and the people of the world, not other Christians.** Paul said in 1 Cor. 5. *What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? God will judge them.* Paul left judgment of unbelievers to God.

Let's define the term (in your worship bulletin). *Judgments vary on a continuum. On the soft end of the spectrum are harsh or dismissive criticisms. On the other end, judgment can be all-out condemnation; even acts of violence. These judgments may be directed at individuals or groups. Judgments seem to be centered on the perceived behaviors or beliefs of the person being judged, but are actually driven by the convictions of the one who is judging.*

We don't have time to address the psychology of judgment, but it is broadly accepted that we tend to judge in others the sin we cannot face within ourselves. You've heard of prominent preachers condemning certain sins only to be caught engaging in the same behaviors. When judgment wells up in our hearts, we should look first in the mirror.

When we judge others, we stand above them and therefore cannot love them. Because love is respectful and forgiving, there is no love in judging others, even though we have a favorite disclaimer: *We love the sinner but hate the sin.*

This is, for those being judged, a distinction without a difference. Our behavior cannot be separated from our humanity or character or value. We might as well say *we hate you; God hates you; burn in hell.* God is free to hate sin but we are never told to do so in Scripture. We are called to love the sinner just like Jesus, which we cannot do if we are judging them.

Let's hear again the words of Jesus and Paul from today's reading. **John 8, v. 15.** Jesus said to the Pharisees who had PhDs in how to finger point at sinners, *You judge by human standards; I judge no one. You judge by human standards.* This is NOT what the Pharisees thought they were doing. They believed they were keepers and defenders of God's standards. This is true of Christians who judge. We think we're guardians of God's standards.

This indicates that humans are incapable of judging by God's standards. We inevitably mix our personal or cultural bias into the judgment. Christians who assume the Pharisaic role are not doing God's bidding, but instead their own.

The words of Jesus, *I judge no one*, should stand as a monument for all who claim to follow him. If you read the gospels, you'll see that Jesus doesn't make critical statements of

anyone except the religious authorities of his day. To sinners of every kind, Jesus was kind, gracious, forgiving and merciful as he loved them and shared his gospel.

Now to Paul: **1 Cor. 4:4...** *I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore **do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes.***

There are many unclear passages in the Bible but this is not one of them. ***Do not pronounce judgment before the time.*** Doing so demonstrates a lack of faith in the power of God to transform sinners. We are not to judge before the time. The time of judgment will be when Christ comes again, and not a minute before. Now is the time of telling the good news especially to those who are bound by sin. For the time being, there is no finger pointing, castigation or condemnation. We simply must stop it.

But the greater reason to cease this behavior is that our judgment of sinners quenches the Spirit like a bucket of water on a fire. Judgment does not bring sinners close to God; it pushes them away. First, some examples of Baptists engaging in high-profile judgment. They are no worse than we are but their judgments were very public. Somehow I must tell you this without being judgmental in the process!

How about this classic by SBC leader Bailey Smith: *God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew.* Jerry Vines, another former SBC leader said, *Mohammed was a demon-possessed pedophile.* John Hagee joined the throng of Baptist voices saying: *Katrina was God's punishment for sinful behavior in New Orleans.* We do not have the right, the knowledge or wisdom to declare who God is judging and why.

I know his organization does good work, including with Muslims. But when Franklin Graham said *Islam is a very evil and wicked religion*, he moved above his pay grade and injured the work of missionaries in Muslim lands.

The judgment winner, however, is the Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas, led by pastor Fred Phelps. They travel the country demonstrating at military funerals with signs that read, "Thank God for dead soldiers" among other condemnations. Tragically, these full time protesters are the Westboro BAPTIST church. We know the difference, but others do not.

Hence the findings of Gallop and Barna polls where subjects were asked to name the word they most associated with various Christian groups. When asked for a word they associated with Baptists, the word most often used was "judgmental." Many of the people we are trying to reach don't see us as Christ-like servants or loving and generous people.

David Kinnaman, Barna Group president, has written a book called ***UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity.***

The findings were based on surveys of a sample of 867 young adults with a margin of error between 5 and 6%. From that total, researchers reported responses from 440 non-Christians and 305 active churchgoers.

91% of non-Christians said Christians hate gay people, followed by 87% who said Christians were judgmental and 85% who said we were hypocritical. These are staggering numbers that demonstrate one reason why we aren't reaching the young generations.

We must see and deal with the huge barrier that exists between us and people who need to know Jesus. We need to see that people aren't seeing Jesus in us. Instead, they see arrogance and judgment.

As Walter Cronkite would say, "*and that's the way it is.*" The song of grace has been overpowered by clamorous judgment. God's forgiveness is being drowned in a sea of criticism and condemnation. It's as if John wrote in his gospel, For God so judged the world.

Clearly, we have been infected by our culture of judgment. Our politics is judgment; our prejudices are judgment; our class divisions are saturated with judgment. It's the air we breathe. So each of us will need help to overcome our patterns. We will need to make these commitments together in our SS class; or among close Christians friends. We all make judgments that we don't recognize when we say them. We need others to help us see that.

A word to children... if you say *He's stupid* or *she's so dumb*, you are making a judgment that displeases God. The same is true of childhood taunts like "nobody likes you," or "let's have our own table so we don't have to sit with them." God wants us to love others, not judge them to be unworthy of our love.

About 1875, a lady in a faded gingham dress and her husband, dressed in a homespun threadbare suit, stepped off the train in Boston, and walked timidly without an appointment into the Harvard University President's outer office. The secretary was immediately annoyed and disgusted that these common people would even be on campus, much less try to see the president.

"We'd like to see the president," the man said softly.

"He'll be busy all day," the secretary snapped.

"We'll wait," the lady replied.

For hours the secretary ignored them, hoping they would get the message and leave. But they didn't. So finally, the exasperated secretary decided to disturb the president. "Sir, there are two people outside who must be straight off the farm. They insist on seeing you. Perhaps if you spoke with them for a few minutes, they would leave!" The president sighed in exasperation. Someone of his importance obviously didn't have the time to spend with them. Stern faced and arrogant, he came down from his ivory tower and approached the couple. "May I help you" he asked with disdain.

The woman said, "We had a son who attended Harvard for one year. He loved Harvard. He was happy here. But about a year ago, he was accidentally killed. My husband and I would like to erect a memorial to him somewhere on campus." The president almost laughed out loud but then said gruffly, "Madam, we can't put up a statue for every person who attended Harvard and died. If we did, this place would look like a cemetery."

"Oh, no," the lady explained quickly. "We don't want to erect a statue. We thought we would like to give a building in his memory." The president rolled his eyes and exclaimed, "A building! Do you have any earthly idea how much a building costs? We have over seven and a half million dollars in the physical buildings here at Harvard."

For a moment the lady was silent. The president crossed his arms and waited for their response. Maybe he could get rid of them now. The lady turned to her husband and said quietly, "Honey, if that's all it costs to build a university, why don't we just start our own?" Her husband nodded and they thanked the president for his time and left.

From Cambridge, they traveled to Palo Alto California and there Mr. and Mrs. Leland Stanford established the university that bears their name.

It's tragic, senseless and misguided when we read people by their covers; when we misjudge or prejudge someone because of their appearance, language, race or behavior. The only thing worse is to judge them at all.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity—Barna Group