**Who’s to Judge?**

*James 4:11-12, Matthew 7:1-11*

**June 14th, 2015**

Have you ever felt judged by someone?

Jesus was mis-judged a lot during His 3 years of ministry.

Called a devil

Glutton

Drunkard

Friend of sinners

He regularly ate with the worst of the worst. Think of the worst home, the worst bar in town, that’s where Jesus hung out.

No wonder the religious legalists of his day would pull him aside and say, “Jesus, you do know that just by eating with them, you do realize that you are causing them to feel a false sense of acceptance by you. Your presence is advocating their sinful lives. Don’t you think that it would be better to avoid them so they don’t feel accepted so they might come to their senses and stop doing what they’re doing?”

Jesus response was “God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him.” I did not come for the healthy but for the sick.

In other words, I came to help the sick, and to help them you have to be with them, and by being with them in their sickness, I’m not actually making them more sick, but creating new pathways to help pull them out.”

Jesus knew what it was like to be judged, misunderstood, and criticized.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone’s judgment? In town gossip? Felt the steely eyes of someone judging you. Feeling shamed and judged on the Internet?

It hurts doesn’t it? It leaves a mark. An imprint.

But it doesn’t just effect the one receiving judgement; it ultimately hurts the judger far greater.

**Context**

**Read James 4:11-12**

The context is that there were those, in the church, brothers and sisters in Christ who were judging and criticizing one another. Speaking evil or ill of each other.

It’s the idea of someone speaking lies about the other person. Name-calling. Tearing down someone’s reputation.

And James is saying, this is not how it should be.

**1:27** James calls this faith walk a pure and genuine religion…

Here James is saying that in keeping with this pure religion, our speech needs to be pure.

**We criticize or judge God’s Law. What does James mean here?**

It refers back to **James 2:8** which says this Royal Law as found in the scriptures. Royal Law is to love your neighbour as yourself.”

So when we say the ill word against someone, we are actually treating the law as if it didn’t matter; we are judging the law and the lawgiver as if it didn’t matter.

It’s like we repudiate; cast off or disown the Words and teachings of Jesus. Thereby Jesus Himself.

This is why James is concerned.

Judgment here is not just thinking critical thoughts, or legitimate concern for someone’s choices.

**Michael Wilkins** says “Jesus here is warning his disciples against setting themselves over others and making a pronouncement of their guilt before God.”

The reminder here for all of us is that we too should be careful in making these kinds of judgments, because we too will be judged for committing an even worse sin – pride and arrogance.

**Matthew 7** says, “Do not judge or you too will be judged.”

The big deal is that when we stand over judgment of someone, we are standing over judgment of God and what He’s about.

Saying I know better. Out of pride saying, “I will never…”, or “I would never…” reveals so much of what we believe about ourselves. That we are somehow above sin.

Alice **Fryling says, “Sin is rooted in the attitude behind the action**.”

Think of the Garden of Eden.

Sin is the attitude in all human beings that causes us to think that we are in charge.

We know better. We play God.

To be in that judger position is pretty dangerous. It damages our soul doesn’t it?

“If we focus our Judger mindset on ourselves, we’ll tend to feel depressed and diminish our self- confidence. If we focus our Judger mindset on others, with questions such as Why is everyone around me so clueless and frustrating? We tend to get angry, resentful, and hostile. Either way, Judger usually puts us in conflict.

As someone who judges the world can look pretty bleak – no longer filled with God sized possibilities but hopeless.”

And so much pressure that it’s up to us to change the world; keep people in line; to manage people’s sin.

I imagine that can get quite tiring.

Looking at the life of Jesus we learn that he couldn’t help people from a position of judgment and nor can we.

James reminds us, the church, that our job is to simply obey this law of love. Not to play judge.

The idea is that we stand over others as their judge; as if we know their hearts or how the rest of their story will go. How their story will end.

Only God knows the hearts of men and women.

Only God has the power to save or to destroy.

**But here lies the tension for me. And there should be tension in your heart as well.**

As you know Christianity is not simple. The Word of God is most often not black and white. It is a faith and a scripture that is full of paradoxes.

Focus on any one truth to the neglect of the other we find ourselves in a spiritual wasteland, even heresy.

**Grace & Truth**

**Free Will & Predestination**

**Heaven and Hell**

Paradox is defined as a statement that seems self contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a truth. On it’s own it seems like an apparent contradiction.

This is one of those apparent contradictions. Paradoxes.

On one hand we read scriptures like this one in James where we are rebuked for judging our neighbour.

Yet in other texts it seems like we are called to judge one another, not out of a position of pride but humility.

Where would I be, where would any of us be without those loving friends who have had the courage to correct us when necessary?

**Jesus talks about this in Matthew 7**.

*“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged.* ***2****For you will be treated as you treat others.[a] The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.[b]*

***3****“And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye[c] when you have a log in your own?* ***4****How can you think of saying to your friend,[d] ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye?* ***5****Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.*

***6****“Don’t waste what is holy on people who are unholy.[e] Don’t throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.”*

Have you ever had a speck in your eye? And you couldn’t get it out. Eventually you have to get help; ask a friend to help you see what you can’t.

It’s a picture of friendship; up close and personal. Helping a brother or sister.

I think we all need these friends when it comes to our own growth and health don’t we?

Spiritually speaking we all have specks that we can’t get out on our own.

**Here’s the context.** Jesus’ disciples just heard Jesus teach the Sermon on the Mount “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (5:7).

Just taught them on prayer “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (6:12).

It’s a given. If we have been impacted by God’s mercy, if the seed of God’s Kingdom planted in our hearts has impacted us, we will exhibit mercy towards one another.

As we receive forgiveness for our own stuff, we are then able to forgive others.

True disciples, who have been impacted by the mercy of God in the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, will exhibit mercy toward one another, not judgment. Because true disciples have received forgiveness, they will forgive one another.

I like how **Michael Wilkins** puts it. I wish I could say it as well as he has.

“To fall into a pattern of life in which we judge others is to show that we are not true members of the kingdom of heaven. Absolute judgment is a categorical pronouncement of the guilt of another person as though this is the final word on a matter. At fault is a person who makes himself and his way of doing things and his opinion the absolute standard. He or she has usurped the place of God because only God can judge in this way.

When disciples have developed this critical, condemning attitude as a pattern of life, they have forced love out of their relationships with others. The kind of love that Jesus offers enables his disciples to give what is good to others, not to condemn them. If we don’t have that love, but instead have vindictive condemnation in our hearts, we demonstrate that we really do not know God’s mercy and forgiveness. The divine passive, “you will be judged,” points to God as the judge, who alone can judge absolutely.”

Our call is to be a people who give what is good to others; not to condemn them.

**Our mission as a church…**

*“live by faith, known by love, a voice of hope.”*

Give what is good to others…not to condemn.

Judgment can put us into a pretty dangerous place.

It’s pretty easy for us as followers of Jesus to get to a place in our walk with Jesus to force love out of our relationships; and thereby force Jesus out of our hearts.

**Rev 3:20** was written to a church.

“Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”

Ever since Passover when as part of Passover, we opened the door as a symbol of letting Elijah in, who is the precursor of the Messiah.

Ever since then I have had two dreams of someone knocking. So loud and clear that I wake up…

The first thought that popped in my head, was this text.

I would sit there praying, asking God whether I have somehow let Jesus out.

A few Sundays ago Kenda and I were at Porto Cove sitting on a log, talking. Processing life and I had this realization that I had somehow substituted Jesus for a set of doctrines, precepts, leadership principles, church planting strategy, vision, mission and values. All good things but as a result left Jesus standing outside the door.

As I articulated that I felt Jesus’ presence. It was like He showed up. Standing right in front of me. I began to weep. It was like my friend was back.

When we accuse, condemn, judge we kindly escort Jesus outside the room.

Maybe it’s time you heard His knock and opened the door and let love back in your heart for friends, those in the body, your family, maybe yourself.

And maybe that’s the difficult place we find ourselves in.

It’s easier to stand in judgment over others, then to pause and see our own need for grace, and our own need for mercy.

That’s where Jesus goes in **Matthew 7.**

He uses hyperbole to make his point.

 “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?”

The “speck” (*karphos*) refers to a small twig or stalk, something quite insignificant in contrast to a “plank” (*dokos*) or large beam.

So true isn’t it? The text illustrates this reality we all know too well, how the problem of the one accused is so insignificant in comparison to the magnitude of the accuser’s problem.

I received criticism from someone who thought I did wrong by allowing someone to preach in my church who still is tempted; struggles – not sins – but struggles with same sex attraction.

**Hugh Halter** calls this the sliding scale of sin.

Interesting that the sin of gluttony is listed twice as many times as homosexuality in scripture.

But we don’t jump on that one.

Jesus is saying that the plank in our own eye impairs our spiritual vision.

Jesus then personalizes his sermon and says “you hypocrite.”

Who knows, maybe one of his disciples was guilty of this at that very moment.

We are all guilty of hypocrisy aren’t we?

“Hypocrisy means to perform external acts of righteousness that mask, perhaps even from oneself, one’s own inner corruption.” **M Wilkins**

If we have walked with Jesus for longer than 5 years we are susceptible to this. In light of all the good we are doing, we can become blinded to the ongoing need we have of God’s grace and mercy.

So we think we see things straight when we don’t. We think we see the sin in someone else, in the meantime we can’t see our own self-righteous, judgmental attitude.

Religiosity blinds each of us to our own hypocrisy.

**Toni dolfo Smith** gave us a great picture on the Saturday night.

He drew this square with a large circle in the middle of the square, filling the square right to the margins. He said that early on in his journey towards Jesus the red square of his broken sexuality was everything. It took up the majority of who he was.

Now after following Jesus for 20-30 years the red square is still in his life, but very small. Taking up very little space in his life. That issue is now under the Lordship of Jesus.

This is where Tim made the comment that when we try to manage people’s sin, as the self-righteous ones”, we do the same. All we see is the red square, and fail to see the work of Christ in all other areas of their lives.

**So how’s your judgment? Are you hard on others? Do you see the red square? How’s your judgment of yourself? Do you see nothing but the red square in your own life, or do you see God at work?**

I was recently listening to **Tony Compolo** speaking on the issue of judging others.

He said something interesting.

“We’ve heard it said, ‘Love the sinner, hate the sin.’ Jesus never taught that. Jesus taught, “Love the sinner, hate your own sin.”

It’s only as we see our own sin, and our own need for God’s grace, are we able to dialogue with anyone abut their own need for mercy.

Love the sinner, hate your own sin?

Later I came across something **CS Lewis** said in his book “**The Problem of Pain.”**

“I remember Christian teachers telling me long ago that I must hate a bad man’s actions but not hate the bad man: or, as they would say, hate the sin but not the sinner. …I used to think this a silly, straw-splitting distinction: how could you hate what a man did and not hate the man? But years later it occurred to me that there was one man to whom I had been doing this all my life — namely myself. However much I might dislike my own cowardice or conceit or greed, I went on loving myself. There had never been the slightest difficulty about it. In fact the very reason why I hated the things was that I loved the man. Just because I loved myself, I was sorry to find that I was the sort of man who did those things.”

Loving yourself. Maybe that’s part of the issue.

Maybe our inability, or shyness from looking at or even seeing our own brokenness and sin is a telltale sign that we don’t actually love ourselves.

“Love your neighbour as yourself.”

I think it takes someone who knows, truly knows, has experienced the grace and love of Christ in our absolute brokenness; seen our darkness for what it is, no mask; open and laid bare, yet loves us still to truly love ourselves.

It’s out of this ongoing experience with Christ our Identity in Christ is rooted.

Self-awareness, flows out of this reality. Where I am not afraid to see myself as I am, in all it’s glory and all it’s brokenness, and am dearly loved.

It takes a secure person to say this…

**"I try not to judge because I'm quite screwed up myself."**

**C.S. Lewis** goes on to say, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”

God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. Do you know that? Have you received that?

To pull the plank out of our own eye begins here.

**So what’s the response?**

Some of us need to re-examine our own view of God.

Someone wise once said that if we call God god rather then a full rich Trinitarian understanding of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, usually it is a tell tale sign we have nothing more than a generic understanding of God.

It tells me that some of us need to change from an old covenant of the law of Moses understanding of God to the New Covenant understanding of God.

The Old Law told us to go judge people’s sin, discipline or kill them and for sure reject them until they cry “uncle.”  The New Covenant of Grace now requires that you become like the Father in Luke 15:11ish who gives his full inheritance to his wayward son, let’s his son go off and make a mess of things, and then waits for the natural story of free will to run it’s course. He knows that if he gives him the money, gives him the car keys, he’s going to jet. The Father is broken hearted, and deeply sad, but he knows that if he doesn’t give the son these gifts, he’s leaving anyway.

Why didn’t the father say, “Son, I know you’re going to leave and go sin your face off and I won’t stop you, but I’m not going to help you either. I will not give you my inheritance or my blessing?”  He didn’t take this route because he knew that someday, the son would remember how he blessed him even though he didn’t agree and it would allow a space for redemption.  He didn’t like it, but he knew that at all costs, keep the relationship open!

*Hugh goes on to say, “Befriending sinners is better than belittling sinners…better to be on the porch waiting for a struggling friend to return than on the side of a relational grand canyon you’ll never be able to cross.  People almost always in times of great personal need, return to those who have dignified their personal journey and given them space to learn for themselves.”*

*How’s your self-love? Do you love yourself as Jesus loves you?*

*Sees all your crap yet loves you still?*

**Most profound prayer is this.**

**Who are you God?**

**Who am I?**

*Maybe you need to pray and ask the Father to give you a new set of eyes for who He is, and yourself so you can have a new set of eyes for others.*