

The Bible Doesn't Say That: Don't Judge!

Romans 2:1-3; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

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Dan Hoffman

So on Wednesday this last week I returned home from an early morning run to find my four kids playing Lego in the twins room. And for a fraction of a second it was a scene of perfect bliss – four little children playing happily, laughing about Lego – what a great parent I must be.

And then from nowhere an accusation erupted as one brother and then another brother and a sister attempted to throw the final brother under the bus – “Jaxon is wearing his pajamas under his clothes.”

Now this is a secret move our kids sometimes pull in order to speed up the “get ready for bed” routine – 12 hours later. But it’s one Nikki and I frown upon as sweaty boys are particularly sweaty when they spend all day wearing multiple layers. And there have certainly been several conversations about obedience in this area.

And so, in a moment, I was jerked out of my wishful fantasy and back to reality – these little sinners really are my kids! But what stood out to me wasn’t Jaxon’s sneaky pajama wearing, but the ability of my other children to be playing nicely one second, and the next second to be eagerly working to have their brother crucified.

And this resonated because I remember doing this to my sister. In fact one of my greatest passions as a 10-year-old was convincing my parents of the faults of my sister and then reveled in her suffering.

Ours was one of those good old-fashioned corporal punishment families, and I remember sitting outside her bedroom snickering while thunder and lightning occurred inside. I tell you this just in case you’ve forgotten since last week that I’m a sinner.

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So, how about you? What were things like growing up at your house? Assuming you had siblings were you a “fought like cats and dogs” family or pretty much a “Perfect Todd and Rod Flanders family”? Remember that episode where Marg is babysitting and Todd and Rod have a “sit still on the couch with your hands folded” competition? Don’t you hate it when you meet people with kids like that? Anyway fire into the chat which side of the fence you grew up on so we can judge each other.

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Today we are in the fourth week of our series “The Bible Doesn’t Say that”. And so we’ve looked at the idea that God helps those who help themselves, and we found that actually the Bible teaches that God helps those who can’t help themselves.

Then we looked at the popular advice that Disney gives to all its princesses in training – “follow your heart; be true to yourself.” But the Bible warns that this isn’t a good idea at all.

Our hearts are desperately wicked and will lead us astray. So don't follow your heart, lead it. Feed it with things that will draw you to Christ.

And last week we exposed the myth that God blesses His obedient children with good stuff – health and wealth – so if you want to be blessed then live a godly life. What the Bible actually teaches is that God doesn't bless us with His stuff at all, He blesses us with Himself – God is the reward! And besides, none of us have been obedient anyway so we deserve His curses not His blessings. It's grace when He blesses us.

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When you stand back and look at it, people think the Bible says all sorts of things it doesn't actually say. And today we are looking at something else the Bible doesn't say, and that is "Don't judge others."

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Now of all the topics we've looked at so far this is the most complicated because the Bible does say "Don't judge others." But it doesn't say this exclusively. And so today we are going to look at two passages that seem to disagree on this topic.

So go ahead and grab your Bible and open to Romans chapter 2. We are going to start there and then get at 1st Corinthians 5 a bit later.

Would you stand with me, wherever you're at? Hear now the word of the Lord.

[Read Romans 2:1-3]

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Now, when it comes to impressions about Christians pretty much everyone knows the church is a judgmental place. Certainly the media loves to point this out. Here are a couple titles from recent news articles that I found: "Church condemns posters depicting doctors and nurses as saints." Or "Toronto pastor preaches hate." Or "Abortion doctor shot to death in church where he was an usher."

On top of these outlandish articles are the testimonies of countless individuals who showed up in church only to feel like they weren't good enough to attend. Being judgmental is one of the things that Christians seem to be really good at. So this is what we do, but what does the Bible say?

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Well, Paul starts by very clearly saying "don't judge." And the context here is chapter 1 where he has just outlined how God's wrath is being revealed against all ungodliness and he tears a strip off everyone who finds their meaning in anything other than God – that's idolatry – and everyone who uses their sexuality outside of marriage – that's immorality – and just about every other vice you can imagine gets listed too. And good Jesus followers love this passage because it shows that those terrible people out there are going to get it.

But then we get to chapter 2 and Paul says, “Hey, if you judge the people who do this you’re condemning yourself.” And this isn’t quite as popular a text in our circles.

The word “judgment” here literally means to condemn or pass a verdict on someone. And this is something self-righteous people do.

Now self-righteousness is thinking that we are all right with God. And this is the one sin Jesus spent more time tearing down than anything else. So Jesus was constantly rubbing shoulders with sinners – some of His favorite people were tax collectors and prostitutes. And He hung out with them so much that people accused Him, judged Him, of being a glutton and a drunkard.

What this means is if people in the church have ever judged you for being sub par then you are in good company. Jesus got judged like this!

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Now, one of the neat side effects of being God was that Jesus didn’t care that people judged Him – He could handle it – but He ferociously defended those He was with and was gracious to them.

So the woman caught in adultery was forgiven. The thief on the cross was forgiven. Matthew and Zacchaeus the tax collectors were forgiven.

Jesus wasn’t judgmental against these people. And this is what Paul is getting at in Romans 2. If we are going to look like Jesus we need to resist the temptation to pick people apart. Leave judgment to God. But we don’t do this. At least you don’t – I’m better than that.

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So once there was this crazy lady in the Superstore checkout with twin one-year-olds and a three-year-old, and she was pregnant. Like who has that many kids and then takes them shopping? And the kids weren’t well behaved. She obviously didn’t discipline them enough or maybe feed them because all three were screaming and trying to get away while she was tried to pay and get out the door.

And so the rest of the people in the line up very helpfully glared at her to let her know she was failing as a mom. Have you met that lady?

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Or have you been that lady? Maybe not with that many kids, but perhaps you were driving too slow, or changed lanes when you shouldn’t have. Or posted something edgy on social media or just got born in the wrong family. Have you ever done anything and been judged for it?

If you haven’t than you are either very young or very naïve. It’s impossible to go through life without being judged. And so when I got home that lady judged me and let me know I should have been a lot more helpful. I’m the victim in all this!

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But there's another side, and that is that all of us hand this kind of judgment out as well. It's human to measure people with different standards than we measure ourselves.

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So last week George Floyd was killed in a take down by the police. And this happened in the States which has a long history of racial violence. And the question in Canada this last week has been "Does systemic racism exist in Canada as well?" And our Prime Minister weighed in on this, Doug Ford made comments, Stockwell Day made comments and lost his job.

And you and I have been watching this and it's a tough question – it's a question worth pausing for 21 seconds over – because we aren't the States. There are real differences between our countries. We have different histories, different presents, and different ideological beliefs about all sorts of things.

But there is one thing that is exactly the same about Canada and the States, and that is that our two countries are full of people. And things like sexism and social-classism and racism make this obvious.

You see racism isn't an American thing or a Canadian thing, it is a human thing. What I'm saying is "I've got a tendency to be racist." I look out at people who are different from me and I judge them differently than I judge myself, and you're the same.

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Now when someone calls you racist you probably react. It's one of the worst things someone can say. So when people have called me racist I've objected. "I'm not racist" and neither are you – right?

But here's the thing, I happen to be a white male. I'm not sorry for that, but I've had the opportunity to live in other parts of the world where I was an anomaly. And I've experienced racism firsthand – but not against me, in my favor.

I watched people get out of the line so I could go first. I've been paid three times as much as another person for the same job simply because I was white. Life has been incredibly unfair in my favor.

And as a result, I've never attempted to buy cigarettes with counterfeit money. But I have attempted to deposit a counterfeit 20 at the bank. Luckily everyone believed me when I said it was a mistake. And that's how racism works. When a muscular black man buys cigarettes with counterfeit money he's a malicious criminal, but when a skinny white guy does the same thing it's different.

But here's the thing about Jesus, He was constantly bumping into people who were different from him and obviously performing at life in a sub-par way. But instead of pointing out where they were failing – like helpfully, in case the prostitute didn't know she was failing – instead He would connect with them and associate with them. And it was beautiful to people who weren't in the church.

And the world was amazed. But religious people weren't so sure. And not much has changed in the last 2000 years. So the world rightly accuses us of being judgmental.

And this is what Paul is getting at in Romans 2. Jesus followers are called, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to rise above our naturally sinful tendencies. All sin is natural for people. But we are required to look like Jesus. So stop being judgmental.

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Now here this gets tricky. You see we all know that we aren't supposed to be judgmental – we just do it anyway. So it just sounds judgmental to talk about judgment. But there is a greasier and harder to nail down side to this. And that is that within the church we are supposed to judge. And Paul gets at this 1st Corinthians 5. He says:

When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. But I wasn't talking about unbelievers.... You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that. I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people.

It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, "You must remove the evil person from among you." (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

The Bible says Jesus followers are supposed to judge each other. We are supposed to call out people who claim to be following Christ but aren't. And if necessary, kick them out of church. So let me ask you how comfortable are you with this?

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I'm not comfortable. And it turns out it's because I'm a sinner in two ways. I'm going to unpack this pretty quickly, but this is important.

The first reason this is uncomfortable is that we don't want to judge the people around us, at least to their faces, because we are afraid of conflict and we are afraid that we are going to ruin our relationship. Oh we will judge behind their back, just not to their face. Are you with me?

So when you sin. When I watch you gossip or flirt with dishonesty or treat someone wrong or faithlessly oppose progress or be unreliable, I don't call you out because I don't want to put you on the spot. It could ruin our relationship.

After all if I call you out then you are either going to leave the church or you are going to gather a group of other people I've called out and kick me out of the church.

So I don't call you out as a sinner, not because I'm trying to treat you well, but because I'm looking out for me.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever seen a fellow Jesus follower do something that wasn't right, but you didn't call them out – to their face – because you preferred to avoid the conflict, or because you were afraid they might be offended and break relationship with you?

Paul says that's not okay – that's sin.

Here's the second side of this that is also uncomfortable. Jesus followers want to grow in Christlikeness. They want to pursue holiness at any cost. They are aware that sin is deceptive and they want to weed it out of their lives in order to move towards the abundant life Jesus offers. That's what it means to follow Jesus.

And so Jesus followers do things like “crucify their flesh.” Our flesh is the sinful part of us that wants to move away from God. We've all got that but Jesus followers fight it. We crucify it. And crucifixion hurts! But holiness is a serious deal. Jesus says:

If your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30)

Jesus followers give themselves to radically and recklessly pursuing holiness because they know that this is where abundant life resides.

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But we don't do that sometimes. I mean is it just me who doesn't like to cut all the sin out of my life because some of it is comfortable and enjoyable? And so is it just me who might be a little sensitive about this if you pointed it out? Am I really the only sinner who is like this? It's quiet in here – I'm the only one here. But I feel like it might be quiet over there too.

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Paul says this isn't okay – it's sin. It's protecting the sin that is keeping me from abundant life and possibly salvation. The book of Hebrews says:

Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies. (Hebrews 10:26-27)

That's a terrible verse for Jesus followers who love sin and defend it rather than rooting it out of our lives.

And this is the point of 1 Corinthians 5. Paul is talking to Jesus followers who want to be saved. And he says help each other at all cost. Don't value your relationship with people over their souls. Don't be most afraid of hurting people's feelings. If you love them then tell them about their sin.

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So people think the Bible says “Don’t judge” but we’ve seen that it is more complicated than that. So how do we navigate through this as Jesus followers and as a church?

It turns out that when it comes to judgment there is a simple answer – simple but not easy. Here it is: “Only judge people you love. And love those who judge you.”

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First, only judge people you love. In verse 13 Paul says “Don’t judge sinners out in the world, God is going to judge them.” So leave them alone. Only judge people inside, people you love. Only judge people you want the best for.

And we get this with our kids. I’m a pretty imperfect dad, but even I want the best for my kids. And so when they disobey me by sneaking their pajamas, and especially when I see them get excited about getting a sibling punished, then I judge them. I tell them they are wrong, and I correct their behaviour. And I do this because I love them and want the best for them. A parent that doesn’t correct their kid doesn’t love them.

So don’t judge anyone unless you want the best for them. Only judge people you love. And do it to their face, not to their friend. Do it without regard for yourself, do it with regard for their souls.

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Second, love those who judge you. In the best cases it’s hard to judge someone you love because it’s risky. It could cost you. So love people who love you enough to do this for you. Love them because it’s good for you. You see when people judge us there is usually at least a grain of truth to their judgment. And if you want to pursue Christlikeness, then you need your sin to be pointed out.

King David responded like this once. His kingdom was failing and he had been run out of Jerusalem by his son. And as he slunk away a man on a cliff started cursing him:

You are a murderer and a scoundrel... the Lord is paying you back for all the bloodshed in Saul’s clan. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom... Taste... your own medicine.” (2 Samuel 15:7-8)

Could you imagine how hard it would be to endure that kind of judgment? What made it nasty was there was some truth to it. There was some error too... but some truth. And so one of David’s men offered to climb the hill and cut the man down. But David replied: “No!... If the Lord has told him to curse me, who are you to stop him.”

You see David was a man who loved his enemies, but even more than that he wanted to be in a right relationship with God. And so he allowed even his enemies to point out his sin because he wanted God more than he wanted anything else. Do you? So the Bible doesn’t give us a blanket statement – don’t judge. Instead it instructs: “Only judge people you love. And love those who judge you.”

Friends, judgment is a swear word in our culture. It doesn’t fit anywhere. But that’s not the case for people who want to be Christlike. We need to be ready to judge the people we love in love. And we need let people into our lives who will do the same to us.