

Merciful Judgment: A Field Guide

How to Judge without Being Judgmental (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

³⁷ “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ 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.” ³⁹ He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye. (Luke 6:37–42)

A Subject of Great Relevance

- A. My first two messages on this text dealt specifically with the verse by verse. But in our exposition of these verses, a subject of utmost importance emerged—a subject that, in my opinion, deserves a closer and more thorough investigation.
1. It’s the subject of judgment—though, again, not God’s judgment of us, but rather our judgment of one another.
- B. It’s a subject of great relevance to us, whether we realize it at first or not. Let me show you what I mean here by asking a few quick questions for your reflection:
1. Have you ever seen a brother or sister in the Lord continuing in sin and not known how or even whether you should approach them on it?
 2. Have you ever gone out with an unbelieving friend and been confused as to the right way to respond to their lifestyle, or language, or jokes?
 3. Have you ever noticed a slight smugness of soul that overtakes you when you get to correct another?
 4. Have you ever experienced the pain of having your sins pointed out by someone you weren’t sure actually really cared about you?
 5. Have you ever watched a church split and splinter and wondered: “Could all of this have been avoided?”
 - a. I imagine you answered yes to many, if not all, of these questions. And, if indeed you did, then you too have come to face this difficult subject of judging one another.
 - i. We have a sense that we are called to do it in some way, but we often have no sense as to how to go about it the right way.

A Field Guide to Merciful Judgment

- A. It's for this reason that I am taking three messages to put forward what I am calling a Field Guide to Merciful Judgment.
1. Merciful judgment is not arrogant, condemning, or destructive (v. 37). It is, rather, humble, hopeful, and restorative. It's the kind of judgment that, in love, helps a brother remove a speck from his eye so he can see clearly again (v. 42).
 2. But it's the kind of judgment that doesn't come natural to us. We need God's intervention. We need God's guidance. We need, I think, a Field Guide, something we can reference when we face the complexities of life in the real world, life out in the field.
- B. I've organized this Field guide around four essential questions—the first three of which we dealt with last time; the fourth of which we shall give ourselves to this week and next. But, to get us back in, let me, in bullet point, review the first three:
1. Who Should We Mercifully Judge? Ourselves first and foremost. And after that, those inside the church in particular, not those outside of it (cf. [1 Cor 5:12](#)).
 2. What Should We Mercifully Judge? Issues of doctrine and morality, but not every issue of doctrine and morality. Only what we called Closed-Hand doctrinal issues and Black-and-White moral issues. Those things that are unmistakably central and clear in Scripture.
 - a. If a brother or sister is straying on one of these points, it is serious enough to call for our gracious intervention.
 3. Why Should We Mercifully Judge? We are not motivated in this with concern for our good and for our glory. No! We are motivated with concern for our brother or sister's good and, ultimately, for God's glory.

(4) How Should We Mercifully Judge?

- A. But now we come to that fourth question: How Should We Mercifully Judge?

1. From the Scriptures I have come up with 10 adverbs for us—10 words that qualify this merciful judgment and point us in the direction of how it is actually worked out in my life. This week we shall deal only with the first three.

(1) Slowly

- A. This is where we must begin—with the issue of pacing. We must confess, I think, this is where our judgments often go wrong. We “jump to conclusions”. We are all too ready to step in and share our critiques and concerns.
1. Someone says something or does something that appears to me to be off doctrinally or morally, and I'm on it like a shark on the scent of blood.

B. There are whole industries these days that cater to this judgmental impulse in us.

1. Look at the magazines as you are checking out at the grocery store—filled with gossip and slander: “This person broke up with that person.” “So and so gained fifty pounds over the last year.” “This dude, though once rich and famous, is now broke as a joke.”
 - a. And all of this invites and calls for our judgment, a glance down our eye: “What a bunch of losers these people are.” And we get a sort of sick pleasure out of the whole exchange.
2. Even much of our political commentary these days attempts to leverage this sort of impulse in us.
 - a. It’s not weighty arguments that carry the day anymore but quick-witted zingers that tear the opposition down. And the quicker you are in your judgments and criticisms, the more likely you are to rise above your opponents.

C. But this impulse in us, stands in clear antithesis to God’s word on the matter. His imperative concerning our judging of others is clear: “Slow that train down...before somebody gets hurt!”

1. Let me just let Proverbs pummel us on this point for a moment:

- a. “The vexation of a fool is known at once . . .” (12:16a). The fool can’t hold his thoughts in. There’s an offense, there’s something bothering him, and he has to let it vent!
- b. “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion” (18:2).
- c. “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame” (18:13).
- d. Or to put it positively: “Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding” (17:27). There’s restraint. He’s not all hot and needing to vent. He’s cool. And when he speaks it’s from understanding. It gives life to those who hear.

2. In the NT, James puts it this way: “¹⁹ [L]et every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (Jam 1:19-20).

- a. Did you hear how he flips it on us? We are usually slow to hear and quick to speak. But James is saying: “If you’re going to be quick at anything, let it be at listening, at truly hearing the other person. With everything else, be slow.”

D. But why? Why is my initial impulse not always in line with the righteousness that God requires? Why the call to slow down before expressing my opinions?

1. I’ll give us two reasons here...

(1) Because of What We Don't Know

A. Quite simply, we must be slow in our judgments because we are slow in our understanding. There is much that we don't know and we should suspend our opinions in some way until we get a better sense of things.

1. Let me give you two admissions we must be willing to make on this point...

B. First, we must admit that we don't know others as well as we like to think.

1. We like to think we can peer into the heart of other people. We know why they say what they say and do what they do.

a. But I love the way Oswald Chambers puts it: "Stop having a measuring rod for other people. There is always one fact more in every man's case about which we know nothing" (Utmost, June 17).

i. What if instead of jumping to conclusions, we decided to ask more questions? What if we committed as a church to assume the best until we are sure of the worst?

C. But there is another admission we must make here: We must admit that we don't even know ourselves as well as we like to think.

1. If we get anything from our text in [Luke](#) this is it! There's a force at work in our fallen nature that moves us to downplay the log in my own eye while simultaneously exaggerating the speck in yours. We are often blind to our own hearts. And when it comes to judging other people, we are often blind to our own motivations.

a. We can be motivated by pride or insecurity. It makes me feel better to come against another. I like being seen as superior.

b. We can be motivated by a sense of bitterness. This person has done something to me that really hurt me. Therefore, under the mask of Christian concern I take pleasure in pointing out how they are wrong. I judge them to get back at them.

c. We can be motivated with a concern for our own comfort. Other people's sin affects us. Sometimes we bring up things not because we love the person and want them free from a particular sin, but because their struggle bothers us.

(2) Because of What We Do Know

A. So we're slow in our judgment of others because of all that we don't know. But we are also slow in our judgment of others because of all that we do know—not about others, or ourselves, but about God.

1. In other words: we are slow in judgment because we know that our God is slow in judgment: "[The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness](#)" (Exo 34:6).

B. We must stand in awe of this fact: God is slow to bring His judgment upon men. Though it is not for the same reasons I gave above. He is slow not because He lacks knowledge about others or about Himself. He knows all things truly, fully, perfectly.

1. Rather, He is slow because He is gracious.

C. Think of Jesus with his disciples. Think of how many issues Jesus saw and could have addressed in them from day one. The list would be a mile long. But he slowly brings up one thing here and one thing there. He is not in a hurry. He is slow.

1. And He's this way with us. How much more, then, ought we to be this way with one another?!

(2) Prayerfully

A. But as we progress, imagine there is a real issue. You've taken it slow, you've withheld judgment until you had all the facts, but now it seems that there really is something to bring up. What next? Point it out! Bring it up! Right?! Wrong...Pray!

1. We don't first speak to the person about it, we speak to God.

B. How should we mercifully judge? We do it Slowly, and we do it Prayerfully.

1. Let me give you two reasons for this...

(1) Prayer Reminds Us of God's Place in the Process

A. We often neglect prayer on these matters because, if we're honest, we're just not all that convinced that prayer really does anything. Let me speak to the person, let me say it to them, and things will change. But go off in a closet somewhere and talk to God about it? Nothing's going to get done!

B. But prayer reminds us of God's place in all of this and He puts us back in ours.

1. Certainly God can use us, we can be instruments in the Redeemer's hand. In many ways that's the whole point of [Luke 6:37-42](#), and the whole point of this Field Guide. God wants us to mercifully judge others and help them remove specks from their eye so they can see more clearly.

a. But, in all of this, we must not start to think that God needs us to this, or that we are even His first string offense.

C. In [John 16:7-8](#), Jesus doesn't say: "I will send Nick Weber to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." No! He says: "⁷ . . . I will send [the Helper (the Holy Spirit)] to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" ([John 16:7-8](#)).

1. This whole thing is first God's job, the Holy Spirit's job, before it is ever ours! And prayer keeps this reality ever before us.

(2) Prayer Connects Us to God’s Heart for the Person

- A. Think of the person in your life you are tempted to be most critical of. Maybe your spouse, your parent, your boss. Now, pray for them. Pray for God to bless them, help them, encourage them.
 - 1. Doesn’t praying for them, start to shift things in your heart towards them? It will!
 - a. The next time you feel ready to bring up an issue with a person, commit yourself to saying a thousand words to God about it before you ever say one word to them. And I promise you, that one word, if you even still feel led to speak it, will have much more of God in it and much less of you!
- B. Let us learn from the way Paul handled the sin-riddled Corinthian church: “^{7a} [W]e pray to God that you may not do wrong. . . .^{9b} Your restoration is what we pray for. ¹⁰ For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down” (2 Cor 13:7a, 9b-10).
 - 1. We are not excited to bring up faults. We pray that God would lay the matter on their hearts so we can come not with severity but with encouragement.

(3) Humbly

- A. So there’s an issue we feel is important enough to bring up in a brother or sister—we’ve gone really slow with it, we’ve given ourselves to much prayer to God about it, now we should talk about the humility that must characterize us as we go forward to address it.
- B. By humility, I mean, quite simply, that whatever it is we feel important enough to address in another, we have this deep-seated conviction that we are cut from the same cloth as them and capable of the very same things.
 - 1. In other words: we are no better, even if we, at the moment, are freed from the things that entangle them.
- C. Listen to Paul in Gal 6:1-3: “¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”
 - 1. “Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted (by the same stuff). If you think you are any better than him, you deceive yourself!”
- D. Since the moment I first read these words by Thomas Watson, I have never forgotten them (pardon the archaic language): “The sins of the ungodly are looking-glasses in which we may see our own hearts. Do we see a heinous, impious wretch? Behold a picture of our own hearts! Such would we be--if God left us! What is in wicked men's practice—is in our nature. Sin in the wicked--is like fire which flames and blazes forth. Sin in the godly--is like fire hid in the embers. Christian, though you do not break forth into a flame of scandalous sin--yet you have no cause to boast, for there is as

much sin in the embers of your nature! You have the root of all sin in you, and would bear as hellish fruit as any ungodly wretch—if God did not either curb you by His power, or change you by His grace!”

1. What is aflame in another person’s life, is hidden in the embers of my own heart. I might think I am so great because I don’t have the flame. But I have the embers.
 - a. Name the sin. I don’t care what it is. Murder. Stealing. Adultery. Homosexuality. Pedophilia. Do I realize that, were it not for the grace of God, I could be caught in the very same things?! Or do I think myself made of something better?
- E. Even the great Paul the apostle stands with Watson in the place of humility: “⁹ I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor 15:9–10).
 1. “If I am any different from anybody else, it is all of grace.”
 - a. And let me tell you something: when a person speaks to you from that place of humility, you feel it.
- F. CJ Mahaney was once asked: “What should I do with my child’s idolatry (i.e. video games)?” His response wonderfully illustrates what I’m after here: “In general, you want your child to be convinced that you can identify with them. So I want to find illustrations from my life that parallel an illustration in his life. So I could say, “Son, this is not a foreign topic to your dad. We are fellow sinners both in need of a savior.”

. . . So let’s say for my son fear of man would be a category. “Well, your dad is just as familiar with that, son, and here are the ways fear of man will play out in my life today.” Not “Here are the ways fear of man played out when I was 16.” No—“Here are the ways fear of man is a real temptation to your father this week.” I think by humbling myself, I hope I make it easier for him to receive from me, so that when I say “Listen,” it’s not “Listen to your self-righteous father who is angry at you because he doesn’t understand why it requires this kind of attention to help you to see how stupid a video game is.”

It is too easy for me to view my son’s form of idolatry as childish, but in essence, at root, there is no difference between our idolatries. His expression is consistent with a 12 year old, mine is consistent with a 56 year old, but in essence it’s no different. Therefore I must make sure my heart is softened by my own sinful tendencies.”
- G. Though Christians can often be the most painfully arrogant—looking down on others who don’t think and act the way that they do—truly we ought to be the most humble.
 1. The cross, before it puts us back together, utterly undoes us; before it lifts us, it lowers us; it leaves us confessing with Peter in Acts 15:11: “[W]e believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”
 - a. Gentile or Jew, murderer or vaedictorian, adulterer or monk, thief or philanthropist—all are equally condemned before God in their sin, and all are equally in need of the Savior’s grace.

- i. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Let's meet there together!