

#214 “Avoiding Judgmentalism”
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Matthew 7:1-5 says, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is 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.” Christians are called to be judging people (John 7:24), but we are not called to be judgmental people. Using wise and righteous judgment combined with a Spirit-led discretion is the call of all true disciples. However, judgment is no longer righteous if it becomes driven by an attitude of superiority rather than compassion and understanding. Judgmentalists ignore their own shortcomings and airbrush their failings while being fully aware of and drawing attention to the weaknesses and mistakes of others. This attitude of superiority and “holier than thou” thinking has no place in the church.

My own experience tells me that I have trouble being compassionate with the shortcomings and weaknesses of others when I fail to see or at least admit to myself how I have fallen short in similar areas or in other ways. The reality is that all believers stumble in many ways (James 3:2) even though Christ has given us the means of escape from every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). Sometimes we just lack faith and succumb to the sin that so easily entangles us (Hebrews 12:1-2). We have our flesh to reckon with, and sometimes we will lose. This is because the process of sanctification is indeed a process, and it will involve peaks and valleys. But the Christian who seeks to walk by faith and who humbly admits his errors and repents will see growth because God promises to perfect and finish the good work He has started in us all (Philippians 1:6). True Christians will grow and see increasing victory in their lives, but it is a process, sometimes an uneven one. In order to avoid becoming arrogant and judgmental people, we must remember that our brothers and sisters are works in process as well. We must remember how we have made mistakes ourselves, and we should show compassion. God is a God Who delights in our repentance and Who is eager, ready, and willing to forgive (1 John 1:9). So must we be. As Ephesians 4:32 says, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Our willingness to forgive and show mercy stems from the fact that we have been forgiven free of charge by God based upon the merits of Christ. Freely we have received His mercy, and freely we must give. We cannot be stingy when it comes to our willingness to forgive. God's call and command for all believers is kindness, compassion, tenderness, gentleness, mercy, grace, and love. This doesn't mean that we don't confront sin or take it seriously, but it does mean that how we deal with the sin of others is impacted by how God has mercifully forgiven us.

It is easy for many to criticize a person when he or she falls, but how many have areas of sin in their own heart that they ignore? So many go after the splinter in somebody else's eye and ignore the log in their own. There is a bandwagon mentality of judgmentalism

that can envelop people, even in the church. Crowds gathered for the stoning of the adulterous woman until Jesus said that the one without sin should cast the first stone (John 8:7). Jesus' message to the crowds was to examine their own hearts before tearing apart somebody else. But He also had a message for the sinner, in this case the adulterous woman. He said that He didn't condemn her. After all, we all stand condemned unless we repent (John 3:17-18). He came into the world to save sinners, and the mercy that He offers is one that changes people. It leads them to repent. As He told the woman, "Go, and sin no more." And as Romans 2:4 says, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" It is not the judgmental that will be blessed but the merciful because these know what it is to have received mercy (Matthew 5:7).

Some Christians fail to take God's commands seriously, believing God's mercy to be an excuse for sin to abound, which is, of course, blatantly wrong (Romans 6:1-2). Others, however, err by being like the prodigal son's elder brother, failing to be able to show mercy and to rejoice when a sinner repents, even if it was his own brother. The church doesn't need any more whitewashed gravesites (Matthew 23:27), pretty on the outside but grotesque on the inside. Jesus called the Pharisees just that, for they were the most oppressive and the most hypocritical. If we are not careful, sometimes the Pharisee mentality can arise within us even if we mean well and think we are standing for truth. By all means we must contend for the full counsel of God and stand against sin, but we always ought to do it with grace. As Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person." May God remove what is likened to the leaven of the Pharisees within us, and may He make us truth-loving people who are equally loving of mercy. This brings honor to our Savior, Who Himself was, as John 1:14 says, "full of grace and truth."