

# Overcoming the Tendencies To Judge Others

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## JUDGE NOT LEST YOU BE JUDGED

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks to the tendencies many believers have to judge and criticize others and He gives an unequivocal command:

“Judge not, lest you be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged: and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured back to you again. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but don’t consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck out of your eye’; while a beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First cast the beam out of your own eye; then will you see clearly to cast the speck out of your brother’s eye.” (Matt 7:1-5)

Can you imagine anything sillier than a man with a beam of wood sticking out of his eye telling others about the specks in theirs? Jesus gave this absurd picture to show us what judgmentalism really is. To judge others for their faults without first looking to yourself is as preposterous as this foolish man with the beam in his eye. Yet judgmentalism is a very common problem in the church today.

It’s almost second nature for many people to judge others for how they look, how they dress, how they relate, and how they act. Why is that? For one thing, many were reared in judgmental environments with parents and relatives speaking evil and slander against others. When you grow up in such an atmosphere, it’s only natural to do the same thing. However, it’s still sin. We see Jesus saying, “Don’t judge!” This is not a recommendation or a request. It’s a command with consequences for disobedience.

## THE THREE KINDS OF JUDGMENT

Let’s consider three basic kinds of judgment. They are:

- First party judgment
- Second party judgment, and
- Third party judgment.

First party judgment is when you directly judge someone for some personal characteristic or for something they’ve done (or not done). Second party judgment is when you judge someone because you sense they’re judging you. Third party judgment is when you judge another who has wronged someone else. This particular kind of judgment occurs all the time. You know how it happens. Somebody comes to you and says, “Have you ever met so-in-so?” You say, “No”. Then they say, “Well, since you don’t know them, I can tell you this story. They did this, this and this.” And you say, “Wow, you’re kidding!” Has this ever happened to you?

Then, a week later, you meet this person. And they’re genuinely glad to meet you. They just don’t know that, deep down inside, you’ve already passed judgment on them because of what someone else said. Such third party judgment usually occurs because of gossip and a loose tongue. There are few things as damaging to the body of Christ as this. In fact, the Lord has some pretty harsh things to say about those who indulge in such gossip:

“These six things the Lord hates: Seven are detestable to Him.....A false witness that speaks lies, and he that sows discord among brethren.” (Proverbs 6: 16, 19)

One reason why third party judgment is so abominable to the Lord is that it separates His people. And once divisions rise up, Satan easily enters. Third party judgment leaves a gate open for the wolf to come in and attack the sheep. The sobering thing about all of this is if you indulge in judgmentalism, whether first, second, or third party, the same judgment will eventually come back upon you! Jesus said,

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged: and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured back to you again...”

Why is this the case? Because the best way to cure a judgmental and gossiping tongue is to let that tongue taste the same medicine it gave out. If you believe that God is faithful and always keeps the promises He makes in His Word, then you must believe that He will be as faithful with this promise as with any other!

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF JUDGMENTALISM

“Speak not evil one of another brethren. He that speaks evil of his brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. If you judge the law, you’re not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver who is able to save and destroy. Who are you that you judge another?” (James 4:11-12)

When you judge your brother for whatever reason, you’re setting yourself up to be his lawgiver and god! That’s a scary thought. When you presume to judge another, you’re in effect proclaiming lordship over that person. And, as a result, casting down the Lordship of Jesus! This is dangerous stuff. That’s what Lucifer tried to do before he was kicked out of heaven. The consequences of judging others in your heart can be quite severe. We’re told in many places that believers have a hedge or wall of protection around them to protect them from the attacks of the enemy (see Job 1:10; Psalm 34:7; Zech 2:5). However, we’re also told that:

“He that digs a pit shall fall into it; and whoever breaks a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.” (Ecclesiastes 10:8)

When the hedge around your life comes down, you open yourself to demonic attack. This attack is often the judgment that comes against you when you hang on to your judgment against others. Have you ever noticed that the voice that so quickly accuses you of your sins and failures is strangely silent when urging you to judge others of theirs? Satan would like to have it both ways. He’d like to accuse you at every opportunity in your Christian walk but excuse you whenever you fall into sin. He’s known as the “accuser of the brethren” and his main objective everyday is to accuse you to God, you to yourself, and others to you.

## JUDGING OTHERS COMES SO EASILY

Have you ever noticed how quick you are to see in others what you’re so often slow to recognize within yourself? In fact, the way you can really nail down what’s going on in you is just call it what you would call it if you saw it in somebody else. In other words, when looking at ourselves, it’s so hard to call the problem pr-pr-pr-pride. But when we see it in someone else, we’ll say, “His problem is obviously pride. Why can’t he see it?”

Often the issue in relational problems is not so much what’s in your brother that bugs you, rather, it’s what’s in you that gets bugged! People are like mirrors. In fact, at times, it may seem that you live in a “House of Mirrors” where every relationship you have reflects back your own failures and mistakes. How often have you found yourself aggravated about basically the same issue with everyone you know? That’s usually an indicator that the problem is not with them, it’s with you!

## WHY FORGIVING YOURSELF IS SO IMPORTANT

When you do finally recognize and deal with your own issues and failures, guess what happens? You’ll find compassion and mercy to forgive and give allowances to others. It’s a true statement that we often find it hardest to forgive in others what we’ve never forgiven in ourselves. Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself. But, if you can’t be honest with yourself about your own shortcomings, then you really can’t love your neighbor. You see, it all starts with yourself. You must learn to have mercy on yourself and forgive yourself. Guilt is nothing more than judging yourself and not forgiving yourself. But, because of what Jesus has done, you can give yourself mercy, regardless of how you feel.

I've often found it helpful when I find myself wallowing or stuck in the flesh to come to God saying, "Lord, Chris is getting out of hand. Will you take charge? If I'm left to my own devices I know I'm just going to blow it." You see, we're told that we're bought with a price and that we are not our own. You have to separate yourself from yourself (I know that sounds strange, but stay with me) so that you can honestly hand yourself over to the Lord. And the only way to do that is to choose to forgive yourself and let yourself "off the hook". There is so much freedom when you do this! Once you "get off your own case" and hand your failings over to Jesus, He can then move in your life with supernatural power.

## THE SYMPTOMS OF A JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT

A judgmental spirit, a clear indication of spiritual adolescence, is chiefly characterized by the tendency to judge, criticize and gossip about others. Spiritual maturity, on the other hand, is marked by the ability to quickly forgive, to make allowances for others, and to give others the benefit of the doubt. Mature love covers the multitude of sins. There are four major symptoms that reveal the presence of a judgmental spirit in a believer's life:

1) You find it difficult to readily forgive others. Why? Because judgmental attitudes are rooted in pride and a prideful person has little mercy in areas where they see themselves as sufficient.

2) You're quick to judge others and slow to criticize yourself. Again, pride has a way of lifting you above those around you. As a result, it's hard to hear correction concerning your own failures. Who can correct you, when you're lifted above everyone else?

3) You tend to blame others far more than you take responsibility for yourself. Taking personal responsibility is the mark of a meek spirit. An arrogant person passes blame, so as to avoid the pain of facing their own inadequacy.

4) You often feel judged by others. Why is that? Because you always get back whatever it is you give out. Since people intrinsically know this, they develop a suspicion that others feel the same way they do and so judge them as well.

## JESUS AND THE JUDGING PHARISEE

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is - that she is a sinner." Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, Teacher," he said. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7:36-50)

## JUDGING VS. DISCERNING

We can learn three key points about judgmentalism from this story. First, Simon saw the woman, an apparently known prostitute of the area. So, the first key point is, whether you like it or not, you're going to observe sins and weaknesses in others. Now, if that's the case, how do you keep from judging people?

First, understand that there's a difference between judgmentalism and spiritual discernment. Spiritual discernment is the ability to perceive things not only as they seem, but as they really are. How, then, can you know if you're operating in discernment in a situation and are not just judging? The answer is really simple: it's what you do with what you see. You can't help but see people's failings and faults. But how you respond to what you see will determine whether you're moving in discernment or judgment.

For example, let's say you see a brother acting out of selfish immaturity in a situation. At that point you have a choice. You can say to yourself, "What a spoiled brat! What's his problem, anyway?" If you think that way, it's only a matter of time before that will come out of your mouth as gossip. The other choice you have is to go to the Lord and say, "Lord, I ask you to forgive him for that. Send someone to show him the error of his ways, but do it in mercy!" When you respond that way instead of with rejection, then you're moving in discernment and not judgment.

By the way, it always pays to show mercy to others when you see them stumble. In fact, mercy is the currency of the kingdom of God! It's like having a wad of spiritual cash in your pocket. Whenever you give mercy, you get it back many-fold. But when you give judgment, that's like paying taxes. You'll never see it again. In fact, it will always come back upon you like an old, unpaid debt.

## WITH JESUS, YOU DON'T NEED STANDARDS!

The second thing Simon did was he despised the woman. He looked at her with scorn and loathing, repulsed that such a person would be in his house. This is where sin kicked in. The woman violated his standards, so he judged her to be more of a sinner than he. Pharisees were notoriously legalistic. And legalistic people are very judgmental because they have certain standards they live by - the standards of their legalism. When they perceive someone violating their standards, they will immediately judge them as less worthy or less acceptable.

The thing about Jesus that so threatened the Pharisees was that it seemed He had no standards. In fact, He seemed to delight in dishonoring their standards by healing on the Sabbath, not washing before meals, befriending the lowly and outcast. They were afraid that if Jesus were in charge, people would run amuck. There'd be no law. Yet Jesus' response to their fears was to charge into the temple and cause a riot. He was trying to show them that because He had come, there were no more standards! There'd be no more rules and laws - all there would be was Jesus! You see, when Jesus is truly Lord in someone's life, they don't need rules, standards and guidelines, or else they'll depend on those for salvation. In that dependency, they will judge everyone else that doesn't conform. Another way of putting it is: Jesus plus anything else is demonic!

Not long ago, an unbeliever was telling me of some good things he'd done and how he went regularly to church. I asked him, "Why did you bother doing something good or go to church?" He looked at me and said, "I thought you were a Christian." I replied, "I am. And there's only one thing in the world that's needed and that is to know and love Jesus. But if you're not willing to follow Him, why are you so concerned with morality? What good is morality if you're going to go to hell? If I were you I'd take this world and suck it like an orange! You might as well get a little speck of enjoyment now, since all you have to look forward to is an eternity of suffering."

Needless to say, this sobered him considerably. He'd never had the truth presented to him like that. Yet, it's true. Religious deeds and works are abominations in the eyes of God unless they're done out of love for Jesus. We're told that all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in His sight! There's really nothing you and I can ever do that is pleasing to God. God is pleased with only one thing: His Son, Jesus! When He came up out of the water at His baptism, the Father looked down and said,

"Behold, my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

God wants to smash every law, every standard, every moral code that you live by and put the center of your being in Jesus. When He's the center, then you'll have the perfect law, standard and moral code built within, written on your very heart. When Jesus ALONE is your standard of your life, you won't judge others when they fall short because you're not following any law for them to fall short of! Then, when you encounter a thief, a prostitute, a homosexual, or a liar, you'll know nothing but the mercy and compassion that Jesus showed to those with whom He associated.

## OFTEN YOUR JUDGMENTS ARE REALLY AGAINST GOD!

The third thing Simon did was speak against her in his heart. If you'll look carefully at what Simon said, you'll see something quite enlightening. His real judgment was not so much against the woman as it was against Jesus! He said, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is - that she is a sinner."

We can glimpse a powerful revelation in this scene: judgmentalism towards another is really judgmentalism against God. When you judge someone, whether you understand it or not, you're impugning and indicting God Himself. Didn't Jesus say,

"Whatever you do to the least of these you do to me?"

That's certainly a sobering thought! The real issue with Simon had to do with his not understanding or comprehending the merciful heart of the Lord. What happens horizontally (between two people) is a manifestation of what's already there vertically (between a person and God). Whenever you fail to understand the merciful heart of God, you will invariably find yourself judging others for their failings and faults.

## YOUR JUDGMENTS REVEAL YOUR OWN AREAS OF GUILT

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:35-45)

James and John were definitely not shy! At the same time, they must have been pretty naive. It's one thing to ask to be seated at Jesus' side when He came into His glory, it's another thing to so quickly agree to share in the cup of His sufferings. But Jesus didn't get upset at what they asked. He simply told them those seats had been "reserved" and it was up to His Father to decide.

Now, where Jesus calmly responded to their bold request, the other ten disciples reacted angrily. In fact, the Greek word for 'indignant' is 'aganatimo' which means 'to be violent with physical irritation'. Apparently, James and John's earnest attempt to get the best seats in the house set off jealousy in the group. There was probably pushing and shouting at how unfair this was. It may have even gotten to physical blows.

Finally, Jesus called all of them over to Him and straightened out the mess. To be the greatest in His kingdom, He told them, meant becoming a servant to all. In fact, He Himself came not to rule, but to serve.

What does this little story show us about judgmentalism? Just that the indignation expressed by the other ten disciples gave them away. Their anger showed that they were just as ambitious as James and John. The truth was they wished they had thought of that request first! So, here's the principle: We tend to get the most judgmental toward others in those areas where we are the most guilty. And the resulting anger will give you away every time. It reveals the hidden secret sins of the heart.

## ANGER: A CLEAR SIGN OF JUDGMENTALISM

While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure spikenard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me." (Mark 14:3-6)

This passage shows us clearly how judgmentalism operates. The first thing we see is Judas judging the woman's actions as inappropriate. (We know it's Judas because he's identified in the parallel account found in John 12.) Because Judas was a thief, anything anybody would do with objects of value would likely come under his warped scrutiny and judgment. Secondly, he judged her motives when he asked, "Why this waste of perfume?"

Notice how his judgmentalism evolved. First, he judged her actions. Then, he judged her motives. Then he became angry (indignant) and rebuked her harshly. This is where he really began to sin. If he'd kept his mouth shut, he would not have hurt the woman. However, since "from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks", his inner judgments came out of his mouth as harsh words.

Such anger is often a sign of inner judgmentalism. Judgmental anger is like a red flag saying there's something going wrong inside. It usually happens when you feel your rights have been violated, which in turn reveals the standard or law that you're living by. Think of such standards or laws as prison bars that keep you from the liberty of grace.

Notice how Judas then covered his judgments with religious concern: "We could have given this money to the poor," he said. In John's account of this story, we're told that Judas said this because he was a thief and he held the money bag. John nailed him. He saw right into Judas' wicked heart, past the facade of false spirituality.

Often, this is how judgmentalism and gossip is spread today - through "religious concern". Someone says, "Oh, we must pray for so and so. I'm so concerned about their walk. You do know that they've fallen back into that sin again, don't you?" And so, some juicy gossip is spread under the guise of asking for prayer. What hypocrisy, yet it happens all the time!

The result of all of this is the poor woman obviously felt put down and rejected. Remember, all of this was going on right in front of Jesus. But, as this story so beautifully reveals, Jesus never sits idly by when someone devoted to Him is judged by another. He looked at Judas and rebuked him sharply. He told him to leave the woman alone and quit bothering her. So what if what she did was a little out of social custom? Jesus didn't care. He saw her heart. Jesus was willing to trash traditions, customs, and even what "made sense", if it meant reaching someone's heart. Jesus was always trying to teach His disciples that the only thing that mattered was to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Now, look what happens right after Jesus' rebuke to Judas.

## JESUS WILL ALWAYS RISE TO YOUR DEFENSE!

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over. (Mark 14:10-11)

Given the context, it's obvious that Jesus' rebuke pushed Judas over the edge. Rather than hear what Jesus said, he went and betrayed Him. Judas was hurt because Jesus nailed him in his sin. However, since

Judas wasn't interested in dealing with his sin, he judged the One who corrected him. That rebuke was the "last straw". Judas was going to deal with Jesus' corrective ministry in his life once and for all!

Notice, also, that Jesus was not hesitant to correct judgmentalism when He saw it, even if it meant His betrayal. Jesus knew that if He rebuked Judas, he'd retaliate. But He would not compromise truth, even when the consequence of speaking that truth was to His personal detriment. He wanted to defend that woman's honor, even if it cost Him His life!

The good news is - that's exactly how Jesus is with you and I. When you are accused by others, Jesus will just as readily rise to your defense. As long as you faithfully forgive those who judge you, God will vindicate you and execute His righteous judgments towards your accusers. As the prophet says:

"No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me," declares the Lord. (Isaiah 54:17)

## FINDING FREEDOM FROM JUDGMENTALISM

1) First, recognize and confess judgmentalism and legalism in your life. Until you see the problem, you'll never get off first base in solving it. Humble yourself to the Lord and, if need be, to those that you've judged. Remember, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

2) Keep short accounts in the forgiveness area. The quicker you learn to forgive and show mercy on those you judge (including yourself), the quicker judgmentalism will lose its grip on your life.

3) Earnestly seek deliverance from any and all root causes of judgmentalism. The root reasons for judgmentalism must be dealt with before there's any lasting freedom. Find someone experienced in the ministry of deliverance to help you discover hidden areas of bitterness and resentment, as well as any lingering effects of past relationships. Often, we'll find ourselves judging a person because they remind us of someone else we've known in the past.

4) Pursue intimate relationships with those who have grace in their life. True grace is generally more caught than taught. Solomon said,

"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm". (Prov. 13:20)

First, disassociate yourself from those people who tend to be judgmental, critical, and bitter, knowing that their influence is harming your walk. Then, do all you can to find and associate yourself with those who move in a lot of grace and mercy. Once you surround yourself with compassionate people who are quick to forgive, you'll soon be doing the same!

"You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat... Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." (Romans 14:10-13)