

Judge Not

Matt. 7:1-6

The teachings of Jesus are very demanding. They will stretch you in places you may have never intended to exercise. If you Go the extra mile and turn the other cheek and give up your coat to the one who took your sweater, if you give to him who asks and loan to others, you may begin to feel as if you are a model Christian. If you conscientiously practice the spiritual disciplines of almsgiving, prayer and fasting among others and if you love your enemy as well as you love your friends, you may look around and wonder if there is anyone like you in all the world...

Elijah was the prophet who was sent by God to declare to King Ahab that there would be no rain until he said so. After confronting the king, Elijah went into hiding. The Lord led him to the Brook Cherith which flowed into the Jordan and there he was fed by ravens until the brook dried up since there was no rain. From there, Elijah was directed to the home of a widow in Zarephath of Sidon. He found her about to eat her last meal with her son before they would have found themselves with no hope of another one. Elijah said to the woman, "Do not fear ; go and do as you have said, but first make me a small cake from it and bring it to me, and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'The bin of flour will not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain upon the earth.'" Later, the widow's son became sick and died but Elijah revived him.

When it was time, Elijah challenged Ahab to meet at Mt Carmel for a showdown. Ahab had 850 prophets representing Baal and Ashterah and Elijah was alone. Elijah defined the battle, let the true God send fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice offered upon the altar. The prophets of Baal went first and cried and danced and cut themselves all day long but nothing happened. Then it was Elijah's turn. He prepared his sacrifice, organizing the wood and cutting the bull in pieces. Then he ordered that 4 waterpots be poured on the fire. This he repeated 2 more times. The Elijah prayed, " Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and

Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me that the people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again," Then, God sent fire from heaven that consumed the sacrifice and even licked up the water that was in the trench around the sacrifice. The people fell on their faces saying, the Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God! The prophets of Baal were executed and then Elijah went up on the mountain and waited for the rain to come.

When it was over Jezebel the queen, threatened Elijah's life and he ran from her into the desert. Elijah went 40 days and nights without food and at Mt Horeb he went into a cave and God spoke to Him, "What are you doing here Elijah? He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left and they seek to take my life. After showing Elijah a great strong wind and an earthquake and fire God spoke again in a still small voice and asked again, "What are you doing here Elijah? Elijah again said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword and I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." God gave Elijah some assignments and then said, "Yet I have reserved 7000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." Elijah had necessarily been isolated but then reached an errant conclusion when he assumed that he was the only true servant of God who was left. Spiritual devotion can often lead to a sense of isolation and this can become a spirit of judgment if we assume that we are the only ones who are so devoted to God.

There are a number of instances of conflict and judgment of one another in the early New Testament Church. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he noted that some were preaching Christ out of envy and strife rather than out of goodwill. This would have seemed to be focused on Paul's imprisonment as to whether Paul had acted properly before he was imprisoned or if he had foolishly brought this upon himself.

There are a number of references to the eating of food that had been offered to idols. The most detailed treatment is in 1 Corinthians. There the believers were divided over whether the eating of such meat was permitted or not. It was a case of the believers coming to a personal conviction as a matter of conscience and then expecting that everyone else would naturally feel the same way but they did not. One side looked down on the other because they were desecrating themselves by eating meat that was the fruit of idolatry. The other side judged the others as spiritually immature since they had no understanding of the principle of Christian liberty.

We could also note that Paul warned the Roman believers against becoming judgmental of one another. These warnings are found in Romans 14. It is in Romans 12 and 13 that Paul challenges the Romans to greater heights of spiritual devotion. He calls them to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God. They were to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. They were to exercise their gifts as a part of their fellowship in the church and to put each other first, to practice hospitality and to live together as true disciples of the Lord Jesus.

In chapter 13 Paul described how the believer is to follow Christ and also be subject to civil authorities. We are to obey the laws of the land not just because we are afraid of negative consequences but also out of a good conscience toward God. The ultimate and highest law that we are to follow is the law of love. Paul concludes the chapter with a remarkable expression of the devoted life, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

After these concerns, Paul addresses the problem of judgment among the believers in chapter 14. He is concerned about the strong judging the weak. He asks, "Who are you to judge another man's servant?" He emphasizes the importance of motive for what we do over the actual substance of some of our choices. If each brother is doing what he is doing in order to please the Lord according to his conscience, why would they criticize one another over their differences? So Paul called the Romans to a life of love rather than some competition over the moral advantage. The tenderness of a good conscience is the object rather than a consensus over a litmus test of spirituality.

Back in Matthew, Jesus warns that the standard of judgment that you apply to another will most certainly come back to you. How often do we become exercised over a fault of one of our brothers while we are guilty of even worse things ourselves? Don't be a hypocrite! Keep your focus on your own transgressions and be very reluctant to come to any conclusions about the state of your brother's walk with the Lord.

What was Jesus saying when He said, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you in pieces." In the context of the sermon, what is it that is holy? What is precious as pearls would be to the person who had found or purchased them? Is it not the insights that Jesus has shared that show us the way to a life that is truly pleasing to God? At the heart of all that Jesus taught there is the personal experience of relationship with God in a way that is just between He and me. Why would I take that relationship and the intimacy of that union and turn it into a means of comparison, a means of attempting to achieve some sort of a superiority over my brother or my sister? Everyone who traffics in such a contest turns what was precious and beautiful into nothing but dirt and mud. Keep your focus on the Lord and enjoy the gifts of His grace. In that communion of two there is great blessing. Nothing else matters.