

BaptistWay Bible Series for Jan. 22: We are not called to judge, but to serve

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We are not called to judge, but to serve

- Luke 13:10-17

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Some great advice most of us have heard is to “keep first things first.” It really is a matter of ordering priorities. But often we fail to do so. It is a human trait to let relatively minor things often obscure our vision of the things that really matter. Luke 13:10-17 shows us some other people with misplaced priorities. Let’s see what we can learn from their example.

The Pharisees were determined to protect the law. One way they expressed their aim was to “build a hedge” around the law. They did this by developing a system of oral laws and traditions by which they would be sure always to be obedient to the Lord.



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Many of these traditions had to do with the Sabbath. They were focused on keeping the Sabbath day holy. They likewise were determined that others would do the same. After all, aren't obedience to the Lord and holiness important and worthy motives for everyone?

Most Pharisees were threatened by Jesus' popularity and the growth of his following. So, they seemed to always be looking for ways to entrap him. Since the Sabbath had so many laws related to it that could be broken, it was a special time for the Pharisees to keep their eyes on Jesus. This time Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. What better place and time to catch Jesus in violation of the law?

Luke, a physician, wrote the Gospel that bears his name. No wonder, then, that he would make sure this story was recorded. It has to do with a woman with some form of physical deformity.

For 18 years, her body had somehow been twisted "by a spirit." The exact nature of her problem is unclear. It may have been emotional, psychological or physical. In that day, it would be assumed that the spirit was—at some level—evil. Her disability, then, would have been seen as the result of something she or someone close to her had done.

And how true it is that sin deforms and twists us, causing us to bow down to the power of evil.

But Jesus saw something else in the woman's malformation. Regardless of

its cause and no matter what the woman had done, she needed to be free from the oppression of her affliction. Rather than judging her and focusing on the source of the crippling deformity, Jesus focused on her need. He called her close to him, and he freed her.

Then, the Pharisees thought, they had him. Rather than praising God for the healing, they were “indignant.” Even the ruler of the synagogue observed that there had been plenty of opportunities for the woman to be healed in the other six days of the week. The Sabbath was to be kept holy.

I wonder if he realized what he was saying: “The Sabbath is a day of the Lord’s rest. Do not expect him to work on his day!”

Jesus’ stinging response was to pin them to the wall by declaring them hypocrites. (This is no surprise. Jesus’ harshest language was almost always reserved for the “good church folk” of that day.) The point of the law and the many oral laws the Pharisees had developed was to consecrate the Sabbath. In the law, there were allowances for humanitarian work on the Sabbath—feeding and watering livestock, and rescuing the “ox in the ditch.” Jesus accused them of treating animals better than they were the woman.

Now, Jesus observed, that woman—a human being and a descendent of Abraham—had been freed from the power of Satan. Jesus was declaring that there could be no greater consecration of the Sabbath or any other day than for a person to be delivered from oppression of illness, disability or sin. Satan had bound the woman. Now, the Lord had freed her. To God, people are more important than rules. The further implication was clear: The Lord God is in the freeing business, and the Lord can do whatever he wishes in his day.

Of course, Jesus’ detractors were “humiliated.” Publicly entrapped in their own snares, their hypocrisy was exposed. We may find it easy to laugh or

shake our heads at them, but are we really any better?

Let's consider a situation we followers of Jesus face today. Unfortunately, HIV and AIDS continue to haunt our society, country and world. The disease can be transmitted in many different ways, some of which are related to behavior that we see as either illicit or immoral and, so, counter to what God's law commands. However, when we hear of someone who has been diagnosed with AIDS or as HIV-positive, what do we think and do?

Often, our response is to shake our heads and say or think something like, "Well, you reap what you sow." It had finally caught up with them. It is God's punishment for whatever sinful behavior in which they were participating.

What would Jesus think or do? Which was more important to him: pointing out our sin or reaching out to us sinners and freeing us from the sin that cripples us? When followers of Jesus keep first things first, they emphasize helping people, not just keeping rules. Jesus' call is not to judge, but to serve.

Discussion questions

- Which is your higher priority: Judging sinners or ministering to them?
- What would Jesus have us do in response to human sin?



in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.