

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for September 23: Right relationships

September 12, 2012

Early one morning as I pulled my car up onto the Interstate, another driver cut in front of me and drove very recklessly. He weaved in and out of traffic and from side to side in the three lanes. He was obviously drunk. I called 911, as had several other drivers.

My anger grew as I followed the driver. I wondered how he could be so drunk so early in the morning and put people's lives at risk by driving. The 911 operator asked me to pull over and give my statement to the police. When the policeman got to my window, I asked, "So, he's drunk?" "No," the officer said. "He's sleepy. He spent all night moving and had to be back at work this morning."

As the officer walked away, my heart sunk in my chest. I had judged this man's behavior without knowing all the facts. I had pre-judged, the basis of all forms of prejudice. Once I knew the facts, I actually felt sorry for him and bad about myself.

Jesus very strictly prohibits his followers from taking on the role of judge in the lives of others. There are numerous reasons for this. Chief among them is, we are not God. Only God knows the whole story. We may see how people act out. Only God understands what drives anyone's behavior and knows how to compassionately respond.

Another reason we should not judge others is that because we are human, we are too faulty ourselves to see clearly enough into the soul of another. Even when we believe we have a solid biblical reason for condemning

another person's behavior, we must remember we have read Scripture through our own very human eyes.

One of the reasons our relationships and our lives stay in such distress is because too often we focus on changing others instead of focusing on the only person over whom we truly have control—ourselves. Jesus said, "With the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get."

Jesus wasn't saying God will set his standards for our judgment by the way in which we judge others. As Frederick Buechner says, "The one who will judge us most fairly is the one who loves us most fully."

Jesus actually is warning us about something we've all experienced. We tend to get back from others what we have already given them. If we find ourselves in constant conflict or distress in our relationships, the place to start in gaining understanding is to look inward and honestly evaluate how we've been treating others.

This truth cautions us in the exercise of grace and mercy in the lives of others. We should use discernment in the ways in which we exercise grace toward others, otherwise, we may be wasting the most valuable of all commodities—the mercy of God in our lives.

Most of our dissatisfaction in life can be measured in the distance between our expectations and our reality. Instead of turning our frustrations outward toward others in a spirit of judgment, blame and condemnation, we should turn them heavenward and do so in a spirit of expectation toward God. We should tell God what we need. We should ask God to open closed doors and even turn us in new directions when doors remained closed.

A pastor was having dinner at church one Wednesday evening when a lady began to scold him. He hadn't gone by to see her husband in the hospital.

She was very angry and disappointed. "Did anyone call the church and tell us that your husband was in the hospital?" he asked. "No," she said. "Then," he asked her, "how could you expect us to care when we did not know?" If God has not met our needs, is it possible we never even have so much as prayed over them?

We say we believe God knows all things. Yet, no matter what God knows, God seeks a relationship with us in which we come to God with our needs. It is not that God does not care. The question is whether or not we care enough to take our concerns to the Heavenly Father. Perhaps the true measure of what we truly desire in life is the depth of our prayers. How many times have we stood empty handed when God only wanted to pour heaven's riches in them? We may never know. We certainly won't know if we don't ask of God what we need.

Jesus puts this on a very simple level. If we as parents and grandparents would not deny our children or grandchildren the simplest of life's needs, how much more so will holy love respond to the needs of the children of God?

Jesus closes out this very stern warning with the basis of all he has been teaching. Everything taught in the Law and Prophets of the Old Testament can be summed up in these simple words. We should extend fairness, mercy and compassion toward others just as someday we will need them to extend some our way as well.