

Toxic Faith (Part II - Messed Up

Spirituality)

Christians Shouldn't Judge

February 27, 2011

Introduction

One surefire way to start an argument with a co-worker, a friend or possibly even a future son-in-law is to declare that something is definitively right or wrong. Or to put it another way, if you want to get a strong reaction out of people, just call something a sin. Just speak out against a lifestyle the Bible forbids or criticize a behavior that isn't universally condemned by our culture and watch the sparks fly. It won't be long until someone who normally

doesn't have much use for the Bible quotes from Matthew 7:1.

▪ "Christians Shouldn't Judge!"

It's an often quoted statement and you observed it in the drama we just watched. Bob said "There's a right and wrong in my book". (Translated: I have a right to judge your behavior). Tim said, "That conviction of yours is something other than love. Love accepts. Love makes room for different opinions." (Translated: You have no right to judge my behavior)

It seems like anytime we make moral and spiritual judgments about another person's behavior these days, we set ourselves up for criticism. Why? Because many people

feel that it's wrong to judge. A lot of people feel that anyone who makes moral judgments is bigoted and intolerant.

But according to the Scriptures, judging is not wrong. The idea that Jesus forbids his followers to judge is a myth. In fact, refusing to make judgments or to call sin, sin, is not at all what Jesus asks us to do. Jesus made moral judgments all the time and he asks us to do the same. Refusing to do so can lead to costly spiritual consequences, not only in the lives of those of us who refuse to judge, but also in those who are never called out for bad behavior.

Review

As Shannon said, we are in the second half of our Toxic Faith series where we are

exploring ideas that can cause us to get “messed up spiritually”. If you want to listen to the previous two messages in this series, you can purchase them at The Well or download the MP3s from our website.

Now as I said a minute ago, many people believe strongly that Christians shouldn't judge. So let me ask you a question: Why do think so many people feel that way? Where does that belief come from in the first place?

Why People Think It's Wrong to Judge

I think there are at least two reasons why people believe that it's wrong to judge. The first reason is because people believe...

- **Reason 1: The Bible says, “Don’t judge!”**

People often quote the first half of Matthew 7:1, “Don’t judge”, when they feel judged or feel the need to tell someone else to stop judging. Now, it’s true that the verse DOES say that, but that’s only part of the verse. Jesus didn’t say, “Don’t judge” followed by a period or an exclamation point. He said, “Do not judge” followed by a clarification of what type of judgments to make, when to make them and how to make them. Matthew 7, when read in context, isn’t a prohibition against judging at all. On the contrary, it’s simply a warning against judging improperly or judging from the wrong motivation. Here’s the verse read in its proper context:

- *"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. Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and*

turn and tear you to pieces.”

Matthew 7:1-6 (NASB)

Jesus doesn't forbid judging in this passage, on the contrary, he encourages it. His focus is on the MANNER or the WAY in which we judge, not a prohibition against judging. He says judge yourself first before you judge another person. Take the plank out of your own eye and THEN you'll see clearly to take the speck from your brother's eye. He goes on to tell us not to give our sacred things to dogs or to cast our pearls before swine. That's hard to do without making a few judgments as to who is a "dog" and who is a "swine".

Anyone who claims that the Bible teaches "Christians shouldn't judge" hasn't read the passage very carefully. Matthew 7 clearly teaches that judging is not wrong when done properly. It's only wrong when the manner or motive behind it is questionable. So the first reason people think it is not okay to judge is they think the Bible says that. As we just saw, a thorough reading of Matthew will lead you to a different conclusion.

The second reason people think you shouldn't judge has to do with...

- **Reason 2: The over-emphasis on "tolerance" in our culture.**

In our modern day culture, tolerance is a highly valued trait that people use to filter

all sorts of things. For example, anyone who refrains from making judgments is considered tolerant; anyone who makes moral or spiritual judgments is considered intolerant. It's interesting to see how our definition of tolerance has changed over the years.

Traditionally, the word tolerance meant

- **“making room for other viewpoints that we find objectionable.”**

But the word has changed in meaning in recent years. The current definition reads more like this,

- **“agreeing with or affirming a viewpoint or practice other than my own.”**

Did you notice in the new definition there's no room for debate? You must affirm a viewpoint whether you agree with it or not. The underlying foundation for this new definition of tolerance is ethical neutrality. Ethical neutrality is the idea that no one has a right to judge the beliefs and moral standards of others. Truth and morality are relative. With this philosophy, there are no longer any universal spiritual truths or universal moral standards. Even in the spiritual and moral realms, two completely opposing viewpoints or standards can both be true at the same time.

I think John Ortberg does a good job of summarizing the modern day viewpoint on tolerance and ethical neutrality. He says,

- **“The world thinks that if anyone claims they know moral or spiritual truth, they will become arrogant and superior, and maybe even violent towards others. So the world wants to treat morality and spirituality as simply matters of personal preference. You have your ideas; I have mine.**
- **Let's deny the possibility that any one is truer than any other. But I don't want to live in that world. I don't want to live in a world where Nazism or hedonism is granted equal moral status with the golden rule. And the reality is that nobody wants to live in that world; we know better.”**

Tim's philosophy in the drama is a good illustration of modern day tolerance. Regarding his views on pre-marital sex, he said, “There's really not a right or wrong about it”. Tim went on to tell Bob that love accepts. Love doesn't judge. Love makes room for different opinions. Love tolerates. Tim wanted Bob to “tolerate” and affirm his stand on pre-marital sex.

While I agree that it's true that love accepts and makes room for different opinions, it's not true that love doesn't judge. It's also not true that love tolerates any kind of behavior...at least not Christian love that is.

Tim's dialog with Bob illustrates the second reason why many people think it's wrong to judge: they believe that tolerance

trumps judgment... that tolerance is the highest value. Tolerance = Love.

Therefore, if you really love someone, you will affirm them and agree with them, even if you find what they are doing objectionable. In Tim's mind, that's the Christian thing to do.

Now most of us agree in the value of tolerance at some level (i.e. we should allow people to express different viewpoints). But what should a Christian do when faced with a situation like Bob's? What would Jesus do? Would he tolerate sin? Would he take a stand on right and wrong? Or would Jesus just say to someone like Tim, "you have your ideas and I have mine."

- **Here's the truth: Jesus judged and so should we.**

Jesus not only didn't forbid judging, he showed us how it should be done. Jesus knew that there was no concrete way of distinguishing between truth and error, or good and evil, unless you make moral judgments. He taught us how to judge properly because some beliefs are true and some are false...some actions are right and some are wrong.

Probably the best illustration of Jesus' perspective on judging is found in the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8. The Pharisees had brought an adulterous woman to Jesus and told him that according to the Mosaic Law, the woman should be stoned to death. But Jesus turned

the tables on these religious hypocrites when he said to them, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone”.

Immediately, all the men who had dragged her into the street left one by one, starting with the oldest. In the end, the only two people left standing in the street were Jesus and the adulterous woman. And with a beautiful blend of truth and grace,

- **Jesus looked at her and said, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more." John 8: 10,11 NLT**

Notice how Jesus handled this delicate situation. He not only said, “Neither do I condemn you”, but He also said, “Go and sin no more”. That’s a judgment. He didn’t ignore or affirm her adultery. He didn’t say “I’m personally uncomfortable with it, but as long as it works for you, that’s okay”. No, on the contrary, he called it what it was... sin. There’s no question he was gracious and kind to her in the process, but he didn’t avoid telling her the truth. He warned her to make some serious changes to her life.

The Proper Way to Judge

We can learn a lot about the proper way to judge by observing Jesus. We can also find some helpful guidance in Scriptures to assist us when we have to make judgment

calls. Here are three guidelines to follow whenever you feel God is leading you to help someone who has fallen into sin. The first guideline is this:

- **1. Check your attitude. Matthew 7:1-4 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?" Matt 7:1-4 (NASB)**

What Jesus is talking about here is motive: our motives for judging other people. He's focused on the manner or way in which we judge. What he says is: 'Yes, there is a righteous type of judgment, but that type of judgment is meant to be expressed with careful discernment, not with an overly critical or contemptuous spirit. A contemptuous person is one who manifests a deep dislike toward someone. That's what can happen to us if we aren't careful when we are trying to correct someone's behavior. We can become hateful and condemning toward the other person. It can become more about the person than about their behavior.

So before you EVER attempt to judge a brother or sister who's struggling in some

area of sin, check your attitude. Ask yourself these “motive” questions:

- **Am I coming with an attitude of restoration or condemnation?**
- **Is the desire of my heart to see this person healed or am I more interested in censoring their behavior?**
- **Am I able to hate the sin without hating the sinner?**

These are important questions to ask yourself before you attempt to correct someone else’s behavior. Don’t judge another person’s behavior until you are convinced that your primary motive is to restore them.

The second guideline is:

- **2. Examine your own sins first.** This guideline is similar to the first, but here the focus is on checking your actions instead of your attitude. Look what Jesus says in Matthew 7:5:

**"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."
Matthew 7:5 (NASB)**

What Jesus is saying is this: take a long, hard look at your own life first. Do you have any areas where you are failing? Have you done anything lately that isn't

glorifying to God? Work on yourself first and other people second. We can't really help other people with their problems until we've examined our own.

Have you ever noticed how we tend to be more merciful and less judgmental on ourselves than we are toward others? Why is that? We all have a tendency to overlook and minimize our own bad behavior rather than deal harshly with it. And that's not all bad. We can become overly critical or too hard on ourselves sometimes and that can lead to depression and discouragement. So we need to be careful not to be TOO tough on ourselves. But here's the main point of this second guideline:

- **The process of self-examination prepares us to**

properly (and compassionately) judge another person.

When we take ourselves through the process of judgment, we prepare ourselves to correctly do it with another person. Once we've been through the process of self-examination, we are much more sensitive and compassionate in dealing with other people's shortcomings.

So before you try to help a friend who's in sin, begin by taking a good, long look at your own struggles. Let's say you struggle with over-eating/gluttony. You should ask yourself, "When have I failed to control myself lately? How have I dealt with my over eating? What have I done to change?"

By examining and judging your own sin patterns, you are preparing yourself to help others. You don't even have to be struggling in the same area as the person you are trying to help. You just need to wrestle with your own sins FIRST. That's the second guideline. The third guideline to use when you are judging other people's behavior is this:

- **Only judge in those areas where God has spoken clearly.**

If we are going to stop believing the myth that God doesn't want us to judge, then by definition, we must get involved in the messed up lives of other people. To do so, we must first check our attitude and examine our own sins before we attempt to

help other people with theirs. But there is a mistake we can make when we finally get around to helping people overcome their sin issues:

We can judge or try to correct behavior that God has no problem with. People often reserve some of their harshest judgments in areas where the Bible seems less than clear. Let me explain.

- **Black (Wrong)**
- **Gray (Free to choose)**
- **White (Right)**

Some areas of the Christian life are black and white and some are many shades of gray. In other words, some things are definitely wrong, some things are clearly right and in other areas we are free to decide for ourselves depending on the

circumstances or the people involved. For instance,

- **Black (kill/steal)**
- **Gray(movies, giving, recreation, etc.)**
- **White (parents/give)**

Killing or stealing are clearly wrong and honoring your parents or giving to those in need is clearly right. But there are a whole lot of gray areas in between...i.e. what types of movies are acceptable for me to watch, or what portion sizes are acceptable to eat, or how much time is acceptable to invest in recreational activities.

The list of gray areas is endless. But here's the key: don't call certain behaviors black and white where the Bible is silent or less

than clear. Adding rules, regulations, standards or anything else we wish God would have included and then judging people accordingly, puts us at odds with God and with the people we are trying to help. This was a big problem in Jesus' day. The Pharisees created all kinds of rules and regulations for people to follow that God never commanded in the Scriptures. As a result, Jesus had to warn people about their teaching.

Don't become a Pharisee by judging people in areas where the Bible is silent or less than clear. If you aren't sure if something is right/wrong, error on the side of mercy and grace. Ask clarifying questions and try to understand the other person's perspective before attempting to correct a questionable

behavior, especially when you are dealing with a gray area.

Why We Avoid Addressing the Sins of Others

I could stop my message right now because I think most of you get it. But there's one more point I have to cover before we conclude this message. No matter how clear the biblical teaching is on helping people overcome sin in their lives, many people still refuse to get involved and this is when it starts to get toxic.

Many of us avoid confronting the sins of other people even though we are told to do so in the Bible. As a result, our friends and relatives continue in bondage to sin.

So why do we avoid getting involved? I think there are at least three reasons why people don't do it, even with their closest friends.

1. Who are we to judge?

Most of us refuse to address the sins of others because we know we aren't perfect. We know that if someone examined our lives, they'd find some of the same junk that we see in other people. Therefore, since we struggle in the way other people struggle, we feel we have no right to call people out for their bad behavior.

The second reason we don't address the sins of others is:

2. We've never seen it done right before.

We feel like judging other people's behavior always seems to end badly. It always ends up alienating the other person. We know that even paid counselors screw it up sometimes so why should we try to help people with their problems. We feel like we might do more harm than good if we try to fix what's broken and so we stay away.

The final reason we refuse to address the sins of others is:

3. It's just safer to not get involved.

We feel like we have enough problems of our own without having to take on someone else's problems. It's too much

work and it's too much of a hassle. We feel if we play it safe, everyone will be better off and we won't have to worry about a possible backlash from the person we're trying to help.

If we are honest, we've probably used at least one of these reasons to explain why we avoided getting involved with the sins of others.

But here's the truth of the gospel: God always gets involved. God never plays it safe. The Bible says, even while we were yet sinners, Christ die for us. God didn't wait for us to clean up our act before he got involved. He pursues us even now because He loves us. And he wants each of us to have that same kind of pursuing love toward others.

We can love other people because God first loved us. Each of us can help rescue someone else from the bondage of sin in the same way God rescued us. When we get involved with other people's sin, it confirms our identity as Christians. Why? Because loved people love, forgiven people forgive, judged people rightly judge. We are to use the fact that God set us free as motivation to set others free.

As the band comes up to do the last song, I want you to ask yourself: who can I help? How might God use me to set someone else free from the bondage of sin? Don't let the excuses of the past keep you from getting involved in the lives of others in the present. Pursue others in the same way God pursues you.

Song: Remember These Chains

Conclusion

My favorite line in that song is "Imagine what your life would be if Jesus had not set you free." When our son was 17, we had to make a difficult choice: either intervene in his life or let him destroy himself through the use of alcohol, drugs and bad relationships. After weeks of soul searching, prayer and consultation with our friends at NHCC, we decided that it was in our son's best interest to take him to Shelterwood, a rehab center for troubled teens in Denver. We did it against his will, not knowing what would come from it in the long run and not knowing if he would ever speak to us again.

A lot has happened since that trip to Denver in 2002. My son is doing really well these days. Many times since then Norma and I have questioned whether or not we did the right thing. We questioned whether it would have been better to let him go his own way rather than do what we did. But two months ago, we received the answer to all those years of questioning and self doubt. Our answer came in the form of a text message from our now 25 year old son. This is what it said:

- **Eight years ago today, we were pulling up to the house returning from Shelterwood. Looking back it helped make me who I am today. You guys**

**made the right decision as hard as it was. I love you guys.
Kyle (Mon. Dec. 20th, 2010)**

Friends, even though you feel like you have no place to judge and even though you've never seen it done right before and even though you are scared to death to get involved with other people's junk, it's worth it in the long run.

We are never more like God then when we lovingly confront the sins of others with truth and grace. Imagine where you would have been if God hadn't loved you enough to set you free from your chains.

Remember your chains and go...set someone else free. Let's pray.