

The Gospel Of Luke

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’²⁰

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’(Luke 4:16-21. NRSV)

Message 12

To Judge Or Not To Judge?

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Luke 6:37

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

This morning we are going to deal with the most beloved and well known verse in Scripture.

This is the one verse in the Bible that every Canadian pagan has memorised, in the King James Version no less. I’m talking about Luke 6:37 which famously says: “Judge not, lest ye be judged” or as my translation has it:

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven (Luke 6:37. NRSV)

That doesn’t have quite the same ring to it in the NRSV but you get the idea. Everyone in Canada loves this verse, it is number one on the charts by a country mile, though recently it has been joined in popularity by Genesis 1:29 which says:

²⁹Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, ... ³¹God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:29-31. NASB)

That verse is the second verse that many Canadians memorise, particularly those who are part of the movement to legalise marijuana, but I think they may be taking it slightly out of context. It

does help to underscore the point however, that it can be very dangerous to craft a theology out of one or even two verses. We need to let the Bible interpret and define itself, nowhere more than here where Jesus teaches us not to judge. What does he mean by that? It is certain that he means something but whatever that is has to be balanced against other things that Jesus said, taught and did, amen? So let's take a look at some of those things before we decide what this verse means.

Judging Jesus

Let's take a look first at some of the things that Jesus said. If we think that when Jesus said: "Judge not lest ye be judged" that he meant: "Never say harsh things about people" then we will struggle to reconcile that with some of the things that Jesus said about other people, particularly, but not exclusively the other teachers of the law. Jesus said things like:

'But **woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them. ¹⁵**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert **twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.**

¹⁶ **Woe to you, blind guides,** who say, "Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath." ¹⁷**You blind fools!** For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred? ... ²³ **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others. ²⁴**You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!**

²⁵ **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are **full of greed and self-indulgence.** ²⁶You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean. ²⁷ **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs,** which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth.

²⁸So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

²⁹ **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous ... ³³**You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?**
(Matthew 23:14-33. NRSV)

That my friends, is a full blown rant. Let me ask you a question, is that a judgemental sermon? You bet it is. If Jesus gave that sermon in this pulpit, if he called other religious leaders in our community hypocrites, blind guides, children of hell, fools, greedy, self-indulgent, white washed tombs, snakes and vipers deserving of hell he would receive some e-mail. More than that, I'm reasonably certain he would be fired.

Let's take a look as well at some of the things that Jesus explicitly taught about judgement to see if we can figure out this one well known verse in Luke 6. In Matthew 18 Jesus taught:

'If another member of the church sins against you, **go and point out the fault** when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the **evidence of two or three witnesses**. ¹⁷**If the member refuses to listen** to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, **let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector**. ¹⁸**Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven**, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:15-19. NRSV)

So not only does Jesus encourage judging here, he provides an institutional process for it! This is institutional judging and heaven gets in on the act. Our judgements HERE are respected and endorsed THERE. That does not square with the idea that “judge not lest ye be judged” means no judging.

Let's take a look lastly at some of things Jesus DID. John 2 has an alarming story in it for the judge noters.

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵**Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple**, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, '**Zeal for your house will consume me.**' (John 2:13-17. NRSV)

Occasionally, the Bible records, Jesus became very angry about some of the things that were going on in the house of God and he took aggressive action against those things and against the people that were doing those things. Can you say amen if you believe that statement to be true? Amen. So what do we do with this verse we all know but struggle to understand: “judge not lest ye be judged?”

Let's do a couple of things. First of all, let's agree to forget what we think it means that it clearly doesn't mean. It clearly does not mean that you can never speak out against another member of the religious community. Jesus did it so he obviously didn't mean that. It also clearly does not mean that there should be no judging within the church. Jesus said there should be and he told us how to do it. It also clearly does not mean that we should be relaxed about sin and non-confrontational about issues that threaten the purity of the household of God. Jesus was not relaxed about those things and he did not teach that we should be relaxed. So let's forget that, amen? So what does it mean?

The real meaning of Luke 6:37 is actually pretty simple and it becomes clear when we quote the whole verse. How many times have I told you that one of the oldest tricks in the enemy's bag is to cut a truth in half or in thirds? What do you call one third of a truth? A lie. Read the whole verse:

37 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven (Luke 6:37. NRSV)

Clearly, whatever Jesus is teaching about judging has to do with condemning, not DISCERNING and it has to do with forgiving or not forgiving. This is just another example of something Jesus taught again and again, though we work hard to ignore it. Jesus said:

¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵but **if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.** (Matthew 6:14-15. NRSV)

In plain English Jesus is saying: "If you refuse to forgive, then you forfeit your grace. If you wish to sit as judge, jury and executioner on those who have wronged you, then fine. You too will have to sit before a judge and he will use the same measure against you. No grace for the wrongs done TO YOU will result in no grace for the wrongs done BY YOU." That is what this verse is teaching. Nothing more, nothing less. The great NT scholar Leon Morris summarises Luke 6:37 with this simple sentence: "A forgiving spirit is evidence that the person has been forgiven." This passage is about forgiveness and about not condemning people who wrong us. It is not about discernment and it is not about whether or not we can notice, rebuke and take action against error, excess, heresy or mixture that is being tolerated and perpetuated within the household of faith.

So now that we know that this verse doesn't mean what most of us think it means the question remains, what is the deal with judging? Do we judge or do we not? Who do we judge and who do we not judge? What is the difference between discerning and condemning? How do we do judging in the household of God? Let's take a look at a couple of other passages in the New Testament and then try and find the line on this matter. Let's look first at 1 Corinthians 5:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. ²And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?

³For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgement ⁴in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

⁶Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? ... ⁹I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons— ¹⁰not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. ¹¹But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. ¹²For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? ¹³God will judge those outside. 'Drive out the wicked person from among you.' (1 Corinthians 5:1-13. NRSV)

That my friends, is some serious judging. And notice as well that he did not follow the protocol of Matthew 18. He didn't meet with the man privately, he didn't gather two witnesses, he just said: "I am passing judgement on this guy. Kick him out!" We'll come back to that. Let's look next at Galatians

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; ¹²for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. ¹³And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?' (Galatians 2:11-14. NRSV)

Paul refers to Peter by his Aramaic name Cephas here and he calls him out before the entire church. Publicly. He did not meet with him in private. He called he and Barnabas, another Apostle, hypocrites, publicly. Ouch. Notice that he did not follow the Matthew 18 protocol. We'll come back to that. Lastly, let's look at 1 Corinthians 11:31-32:

³¹For **if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.** ³²But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (NKJV)

Alright, I think that is enough text for us to state some principles that will help us find the line on this difficult issue.

Principle #1: We Don't Judge Pagans

1 Corinthians 5 makes that very clear:

¹²For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? ¹³God will judge those outside. (NRSV)

Who do we NOT JUDGE? Pagans. Outsiders. Somebody asked me the other day who ‘the pagans’ are and I should probably explain that if you are new. Pagan is just a word the Bible uses to describe outsiders, people who are not Christians. It’s better than the other word the Bible uses for the uninitiated and outsider, which is *idiōtēs* (*idiotes*) which doesn’t translate well into English. Don’t judge the pagans. God will do that. Don’t throw stones at homosexuals! Don’t look down your noses at drug users! Don’t picket abortion clinics and intimidate young girls who have made and are making bad choices. God didn’t put an electric fence around the tree of good and evil and neither should we. If people want to make the choice to be god of their own life than they will sit before god and explain that. You will not be invited so sit it out and relax. Don’t judge the pagans.

Principle #2: We DO Judge Believers

1 Corinthians 5 helps us out there as well:

¹²For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? ¹³God will judge those outside. ‘Drive out the wicked person from among you.’ (NRSV)

The judgement process that Jesus recommended was for use with BELIEVERS and members of the church. He said:

‘If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. (Matthew 18:15. NRSV)

It’s pretty obvious who we are talking about there isn’t it? A fellow believer. A member of the church. We need to do this work or we will become pagans and we will have to sit before the judgement of God. That’s what 1 Corinthians 11 says:

³¹For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. ³²But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, **that we should not be condemned with the world.** (NKJV)

Do you see that? Everyone on planet earth will face judgement. If you are a believer you will face it in the church. We will clean you up and measure you against the word of God and pierce

you with the Sword of the Spirit until nothing gross is hanging off you. If you refuse that process than you will stand with the pagans and suffer the condemnation of Almighty God. You can have it now or have it later. This is why, we DO JUDGE believers.

It breaks my heart how often we get this completely wrong. We Christians have specialised in throwing rocks at gays and giving a free pass to our own people. We forbid church discipline but we encourage judgement of pagans. That is the exact opposite of what the Bible tells us to do. Let's turn this around in here friends. Let's speak lovingly but firmly to one another and let's speak only Gospel and grace to the pagans. Amen? Amen.

Principle #3: We Do Not Condemn Our Personal Offenders

That is the core meaning of our primary text this morning:

'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven (Luke 6:37. NRSV)

It is also the meaning of Matthew 6 where Jesus says:

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15. NRSV)

If there is no grace for the wrongs done TO YOU then there will be no grace for the wrongs done BY YOU.

Principle #4: Preachers Of The Word Are Called Out Publicly

We saw that in Matthew 23, "Woe to you blind guides, hypocrites!" and we saw that in Galatians 3 when Paul called out Barnabas and Peter. Why did they do this? Because the Bible says some things that we sometimes forget. In 1 Timothy 5 there is some teaching about elders or bishops, those who teach the word and OVER SEE churches:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching; ¹⁸for the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain', and, 'The labourer deserves to be paid.' ¹⁹Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰**As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear.** ²¹In

the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions **without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality.** (1 Timothy 5:17-21. NRSV)

The Bible says that elders who are the salaried preachers, who oversee the ministry of the word are public characters. As a result of that they will be subject to all sorts of petty allegations by uninformed people, have measures in place to protect them from that. Here that before we move on. Preachers are to be protected from petty allegations from poorly informed people. BUT if a teaching elder persists in an error, because they are public characters, they are to be called out publicly. Show no partiality.

This is a serious business friends and that is why the Bible also says:

My brethren, **let not many of you become teachers,** knowing that **we shall receive a stricter judgment.**

²For **we all stumble in many things.** If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. (James 3:1-2. NKJV)

James says: “Think long and hard before stepping into this pulpit because you will be judged by a different process. You will not be judged by the Matthew 18 protocol. We will not pull you aside and speak to you in private. You will be called out publicly when you preach error. And don’t think it won’t happen to you, because WE ALL STUMBLE in our words.” Do you hear that? Last week I stepped into it, I tell you. I had the audacity to mention Joyce Meyer in my message and I paid for that. I had more e-mails and meetings on this than I’ve had in response to any comment ever made previously from this pulpit. We love Joyce in here. But let me ask you, does Joyce get a free pass because she sells more books than anyone else in Canada? No, that would be showing partiality. Did she step into the pulpit? Yes she did. Is she subject then to a harsher process than a regular person? Yes she is. The truth is her story is very similar to Peter’s in Galatians chapter 2. She was rebuked and she repented. There was a Senate investigation into her lavish spending of ministry dollars and they rebuked her PUBLICLY and harshly. American Senators who love the church, these were Christian men, rebuked her for her lavish purchases because they said it endangered the tax status of every church in America. The government gives you a tax receipt for your tithe under the assumption that the church will serve the poor in their cities. If we use your tithe dollars to buy \$23000 gold toilets we have abused that trust and we should be rebuked for that. She was. Now in her favour, of the six prosperity preachers who were the subject of this investigation she was the only one to cooperate fully with the investigation and she was the only one who issued a statement saying that immediate changes would be made in her organisation. That’s why I say that her story is like Peter’s. She was

rebuked, she repented and she made changes. Good for her. But the story still has to be told my friends. The early church didn't cut Galatians 2 out of the Bible after Peter repented. The sin was public, the rebuke is kept public. Why?

so that the rest also may stand in fear. (1 Timothy 5:20. NRSV)

That is the deal for preachers. You make a deal with God. You sign over to God the right to use your life as a pulpit for the proclamation of the whole truth of God. He will push it out through your mouth or if you neglect a part of his truth he will push it out through your life. One way or the other the message will get out through you and we all knew that when we took the deal. It will happen to me because I'm not perfect. One day I will say something from here that is not true. I hope it will be due to human error or simple ignorance and not due to mean spiritedness, but regardless it will happen. Someone will correct me, if need be publicly. Another pastor in another pulpit or even an elder at this church will catch my mistake through his own study of the Word and will call it out. I will have to choose how I respond to that. I can either apologise and study to find my error and then move on or I can hide in a corner and rock back and forth moaning about how mean the world is. I knew the deal going in and I pray I choose the former and not the latter. Hold me accountable to that.

Principle #5: Zeal For The House Trumps Concern For Hurt Feelings

Jesus didn't appear too concerned for the feelings of his fellow rabbis when he cleared the temple with a whip. Zeal for the house of the Lord consumed him. Jesus didn't spend too much time reading his e-mail it appears. Matthew 15 records:

¹²Then the disciples approached and said to him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?' ¹³He answered, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. (Matthew 15:12-14. NRSV)

People were offended at your sermon Jesus, what are you going to do about that? Nothing. Leave them alone, they are blind guides of the blind. Jesus did not spend his time obsessing over the possibility of giving offense. We need to hear that. So much energy is lost in the church worrying that other people are going to be offended. Who is offended? Who takes their own dignity so seriously that they can't be corrected by the word of God? No one that truly knows

God or loves his Word. Let's stop worrying about it. I'm not saying that we should be careless or sharp, I'm saying I want to dial down 10% how much we worry that people are going to be offended and I want to dial up 70% our zeal for the house and for the name of the Lord.

Can I risk stepping back into it in order to make a contemporary point? The Catholic church in Europe has learned this lesson the hard way. There was an error there in their theology that needed to be called out. The Bible says a couple of things that some preacher in their pulpits should have been shouting at the top of his lungs. Things like:

²A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2. NKJV)

³The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.

⁴For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

⁵Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:3-5. NRSV)

Some brave preacher should have been screaming out: "Hey Bishops! You all ought to be married to a WIFE and you should be having regular marital congress with your wives BECAUSE OF YOUR LACK OF SELF CONTROL. That's in the Bible!!!" But nobody did. They showed partiality and fear and as a result the Catholic church is dead now in Europe, likely never to rise. Hurt feelings are not as important as zeal for the house of the Lord. When the church falls as it has done in Europe the name of Jesus is dragged through the mud. Let's care a little more about that and a little less about the dignity of our favourite preachers, myself included.

Principle #6: Restoration Is Always The End-game

The end of this process is not yelling and screaming, it is not a whip of chords, the end of the process is always supposed to be aimed at restoration to righteousness. Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 5:

When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, **so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.** (1 Corinthians 5:4-5. NRSV)

The goal is not ultimately to get rid of people, it's to save people! If we allow someone to sit in here their whole lives thinking they are ok with God when in fact they are not, we keep them as friends but consign them to hell. But if we judge one another, hold each other accountable, call out sin and deal with truth then we may bruise some egos, we may batter some friendships but we will ultimately save some souls and restore people to salvation in Christ. That is the end game my friends however costly it may be. We're in it to save amen? Amen.

Conclusion:

So how do we square up against this teaching? I want to confess to you that I sometimes turn over one table too many and sometimes I miss the target altogether. Zeal for the house of the Lord consumes me but I am not as good at this as Jesus was. My desire is to speak the truth in love but I'm not perfect at that and the Lord is working on me and I own my mistakes. How are you doing? Most Christians have the opposite problem than the one I have. Most Christians too often give permission to brothers and sisters to continue down the road to hell by saying nothing and risking no offence. They are face book friends and associates with people who call themselves believers yet get drunk, are promiscuous, cheat on their taxes and gossip about leadership. We tell ourselves that we are trying to stay in contact so as to be a good example. Could you quote me a Scripture for that please? Here's one I think you need to reckon with:

I am writing to you **not to associate** with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. **Do not even eat with such a one.** (1 Corinthians 5:11. NRSV)

According to the Bible you are only supposed to have two types of friends: full blown pagans that you try to reach with the Gospel and Christians who are living under the correction of the Word of God. You are not to associate with Christians who live like pagans. How are you doing with that? How is your zeal for the house and for the name of Jesus? Let's pray on that.