

August 21, 2016

Church Planting
Don't Judge Me!
Acts 18:12-17

Opening words: When I was in high school, my home church had a pastor by the name of Jim Cox. In my opinion, he could do no wrong. I still consider him the finest pastor I have ever known. He was followed by a pastor by the name of Earl Lukanbuhl. He was the polar opposite. He could do no right. During my college years, I told everyone with ears how I felt. He didn't know anything. He didn't know how to dress. He looked like Ben Franklin dressed in mid-1970's clothing. He didn't know how to preach. On a good day he was just boring. He didn't know how to lead or inspire because he lacked passion and vision. He was a train wreck, but he did excel at one thing, taking vacations. He worked as little as possible. Earl left that church years ago. I don't know what happened to him, but I do know what happened to me. I went into the ministry and people started judging me. Do you know what I have learned about the ministry? It is hard. It is really hard to be everything to everyone. As I look back on my critical, judgmental words about Earl, I am ashamed. My harsh words did more to discredit me than damage to him. Can anyone here relate to my story? Have you ever judged someone harshly?

This is sermon number forty-two in my sermon series, *Church Planting*. Do you remember my goal? I am preaching through the Book of Acts. I am doing this for one reason. I am hoping to reconnect with the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who created the church in the very beginning and it will be the Holy Spirit who revives the church again. Human effort and determination are not enough. Our scripture reading for today is Acts 18:12-17. Let me call this message *Don't Judge Me!*

Acts 18:12-17 While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. ¹³ "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law." ¹⁴ Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you ¹⁵ But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." ¹⁶ So he drove them off. ¹⁷ Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.

Chuck Swindoll is an Evangelical Christian pastor, author and educator. You may know him from his radio program, *Insight for Living*, which airs on 2,000 different radio stations around the world. He tells of being at a pastor's conference in Spokane, Washington. On the first day, a man approached him and told him how excited he was to hear him preach. That evening as the service began, Swindoll noticed the man sitting

near the front. But only a few minutes into the message, the man was sound asleep. Swindoll thought to himself that perhaps he was tired after a long day's drive and couldn't help himself. But the same thing happened the next few nights, and Dr. Swindoll found his exasperation with the man growing. On the last night, the man's wife came up and apologized for her husband's inattention to the messages. She then explained. He had recently been diagnosed as having terminal cancer and the medication he was taking to ease the pain made him extremely sleepy. But it had been one of his life-long ambitions to hear Dr. Swindoll speak before he died, and now he had fulfilled that goal. Swindoll was humbled by her words and ashamed by his own thoughts. If you have ever judged somebody wrongly, say, **"Amen!"** Mother Teresa once said, *"If you judge people, you have no time to love them."*

Like last week, we are in the eighteenth chapter of Acts. The Apostle Paul is still in the city of Corinth. According to our first verse, it was when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia. That means it is about the year 51 AD. Gallio was respected in that corner of the world for two reasons. First, Gallio was respected because he was well connected. His brother, Seneca, was the tutor of Nero, the Roman Emperor. Second, Gallio was respected because he had shown himself to be a fair and calm man. It is those qualities that saved Paul. They are found on display in this morning's story.

Once again, Paul had worn out his welcome. The Jews had grown tired of his lecturing in the synagogue and dragged him into court. Gallio was the judge. They felt like they had a solid case against Paul. He was worshipping God in a new way. They may have been the first to recognize that Christianity stood alone. It was not an offshoot of Judaism, making it an illegal religion in the eyes of Rome. As Paul was about to defend himself, Gallio throws the whole case out. He rules that it is not a matter of the state. It was an internal matter among the Jews. They are expelled from the courtroom and then the ugly scene grows uglier. The Jews are more than embarrassed. They turn on the ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes, and beat him. It sounds shocking to us, but it must have been just another day for Gallio. He didn't seem to care. In the end, the group that wanted to make Paul look bad made themselves look bad. That is what always happens to judges. In the end they make themselves look bad. When was the last time you judged someone harshly?

Webster defines judgement as the act or process of forming an opinion after careful thought. We don't need the word defined, because we have been judged and we have all judged others. There is no other way to say it. Judging hurts everyone. Judging hurts the judged. Judging hurts the judge. Judging reinforces stereotypes. Judging creates a negative environment. Judging damages organizations, and judging absolutely damages the church. The reason is simple. The church is not just another organization. The church is different because we are supposed to know better. We are supposed to be a little more like Jesus every day. Jesus told us not to judge. Do you remember the story?

It is found in the eighth chapter of John. The story is the adulterous woman. Jesus is at the Mount of Olives and teaching the people about the Kingdom of God. Without warning, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees come to Jesus with an adulterous woman. By definition, it takes two people to commit adultery. However, in this story the woman stands alone. The Old Testament law was clear. The woman should be stoned to death. Jesus looked at the woman and had pity on her. He doesn't respond at first. He writes something in the sand. After a period of silence, Jesus looks at the judging crowd and says, "Ye that is without sin cast the first stone." Everyone in the crowd dropped their stone because everyone in the crowd had sinned. The crowd goes home and Jesus tells the woman to sin no more. There is only one point to this story. Judging is wrong, yet everyone judges. The problem is not Jesus. The Master spoke clearly, "DON'T JUDGE!" The problem is us. We have decided not to listen to Jesus. Maybe our problem is theological in nature? Our understanding of God is out of balance. We are top heavy on grace and light on sin. Listen to what I am about to say. God hates sin. God says judging is a sin, so God hates our judging. That means when you have harsh words about others, no matter how you disguise it, it is a sin. When was the last time you judged someone harshly? If you can remember that, say, "**Amen!**"

Several years ago, I was at Fort Myers Beach with my family. Everyone went for a week's vacation. There was Kathryn and I. Our daughter, Anna, who loves Florida, went. Our other daughter, Sarah, and our son-in-law, Vic, went. There was his brother Eric and my brother-in-law, Tom. Sue and Dan Tucker showed up every night. (It was the highlight of the day ☺.) Nightly, there were a lot of harsh words after they left.

Most of our time was spent around the pool or at the beach. We didn't have a car. It really didn't matter, because we could walk to the beach or a store for supplies. When we walked to the store we took the shortest route. It was through an empty parking lot next to a closed plaza. There was only one store in the plaza left, a liquor store. We walked by that liquor store several times. It was always busy. One of the times we walked by the liquor store my daughter, Sarah, said to me, "I love people in liquor stores!" She was an adult and I was limited in what I could say. I asked, "Why?" She answered, "Most people in liquor stores have so many problems, they don't have time to judge you. In church, everyone feels like they have their lives in order, so they have lots of time to judge you. Church people judge you, liquor people leave you alone." I didn't respond because I thought she might be right. She worked on a church staff for nearly six years and did a great job. She left that job for several reasons. One of the reasons was, she grew tired of being judged by church people. How does that story make you feel? Do you think she may be right? Do you find some truth in her statement, "In church, everyone feels like they have their lives in order, so they have lots of time to judge you?" When you judge others, you damage the church, the bride of Christ.

When you judge others, you reveal your greatest flaws. Psychologists tell us we judge other people to fill in various voids in our lives. A website called PositivelyPresent.com

wrote about these voids in a May 2009 article called *Stop Judging*. How many of these voids do you have in your life?

We judge because we are afraid! Our prejudices fall into this category. That means, you judge the person or group who intimidates you. The more times you judge a person or a group, the more that person or group intimidates you. Jesus does not want us to be intimidated by anyone. Never forget it. You are a child of God! When you judge, you are telling the world you are afraid!

We judge because we are lonely! We have talked about this in the past. One of our greatest human fears is loneliness. We rarely judge in isolation. We find others who hold the same opinions and form a bond with them. This is odd to say, but judging fills a social void. When you judge, you are telling the world you are lonely!

We judge because we are hungry for change! I have never met a person who had a perfect life. Everybody wants to change something. We judge the person who has what we want. I have heard it a million times. They predict a failed married because they want to be married, or they are bored in their own marriage. When we judge, we are telling the world we we are seeking a change!

We judge because we are insecure! This is the bottom line on judging. We really don't care for ourselves, so we put others down. The goal is to make others less attractive than ourselves. The goal is to get the attention off yourself so others won't see your imperfections. The more you judge others, the less you like yourself. When you judge, you are telling the world you are insecure!

Can I ask you our question one more time? When was the last time you judged someone harshly? When you did, you were telling the world you were afraid, lonely, hungry for a change and insecure. If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

In 1884, Charles Elliot was president of Harvard University. One day on his agenda was a couple who wanted to establish some kind of a memorial in the name of their son. When the grieving couple came, they were very unimpressive. Elliot wished they would just leave. They were wasting his valuable time. Trying to speed through the appointment, he asked the couple what he could do. They spoke of some kind of memorial, but their words fell on deaf ears. In a patronizing tone, Eliot brushed aside the idea as being too expensive for this modest couple and they departed. The next year, Eliot learned that this plain pair had gone elsewhere and established a \$26 million memorial named Leland Stanford Junior University. Today, we call their memorial Stanford University. Charles Elliot judged this couple wrongly and he missed out on a great opportunity. Can I ask you a question? What great opportunities have we lost because we judge wrongly?

When was the last time you judged someone harshly? You know better! This is the church, and in the true church, judging others will not be tolerated. It is actually a sin. In the true church everyone should be accepted the way they are. Never forget what Mother Teresa said, *"If you judge people, you have no time to love them."*

Will you pray with me?