

Try Walking in Their Shoes.

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Luke 6:37 (NKJV)

*“Judge not, and you shall not be judged.
Condemn not, and you shall not be
condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”*

I was riding on a crowded subway. A person dressed in black leather with piercings all over their face, black makeup around their eyes, black hair sticking straight up, and leather bands around their wrists (with metal spikes sticking out of them) was sitting on the other side of the subway car from me. I immediately went into judgment mode, thinking, “how evil they look” and wondering “who would do that to themselves?” At the next stop, an elderly lady came through the door closest to this person. No one else moved except this person in black who immediately got up and gave the lady a place to sit. The Holy Spirit immediately pointed out to me that I should not have judged someone by how they looked. I have never forgotten that.

When we were missionaries in Fiji we had to see beyond our own American culture. In order to build relationships and be effective at ministering, it was important to try to understand how other people perceived the world around us. One afternoon, we were all hanging around; fellowshiping at church after the service was finished. All the windows were open and it started to rain. I asked one of the young men who was attending our Bible school to close the windows so it didn't get all wet in the sanctuary. A few minutes later I looked up and he had haphazardly closed some of the windows and left others open. I was just about to judge him for doing a lousy job and ask him again to close all the windows. Fortunately the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart. He pointed out that there were people sitting along the wall under the windows that were left open. I was reminded that it is taboo in the Fijian culture to reach over someone's head. It is an act of disrespect and

aggression. He could not close those windows because it was culturally inappropriate. Fortunately, I didn't say anything to him. It would have put him in an untenable situation.

Most of the time when we judge others we are basing our conclusions on our own preconceived ideas of what is acceptable, right, or wrong. Our upbringing, educational experiences, and other outside influences have molded us, and our particular worldview. We sometimes fail to take into consideration what might be the norm for someone else. We forget that each one of us is unique. When faced with behavior we don't approve of, or cultural differences we don't understand, we have the opportunity to examine our own habits and cultural upbringing. Perhaps we will discover that there are other ways to process thoughts or do things that are just as valid, or even better than our way. We should try walking in their shoes.

When we are born again, Christian principles and culture must be our guide. If someone else does things differently than you do, it doesn't mean that it's wrong. We must make an effort to filter our judgments through the Word. If it doesn't offend God, it shouldn't offend us. We also have to understand that we are each in a different place in our walk with God. We may have overcome something that others have not. We may have received revelation on principles of godly living that someone else has not yet had. We are all a work in progress, on the road of sanctification.

Luke 6:37, in The Passion Translation says, *"Forsake the habit of criticizing and judging others, and then you will not be criticized and judged in return. Don't look at others and pronounce them guilty, and you will not experience guilty accusations yourself. Forgive over and over and you will be forgiven over and over."*

Why is it important not to judge?

Judging and unforgiveness are dangerous practices for Christians. Warnings on these issues are very clearly stated in the scriptures.

Here are two reasons why it is crucial not to judge or hold onto unforgiveness:

First Reason:

They are both self-destructive behavior. You open yourself up to severe judgment.

Matthew 7:2 (NKJV)

“with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

Matthew 18:34-35 (NKJV)

“And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. (35) So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Second Reason:

They both destroy relationships.

The essence of the Gospel is based on reconciliation and relationship with God and then with each other.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (NKJV)

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, {19} that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.”

We are to be one in Christ. The Gospel brings unity so we can function together as the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:1-6 9 (NKJV)

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, (2) with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, (3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism; (6) one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in you all.”

Philippians 1:27 (NKJV)

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,” Paul goes on to say in 2:1-13, “Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, (2) fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. (3) Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (4) Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Judging others and unforgiveness are divisive. They do not promote unity. They drive a wedge between you and God... and you and others.

Why is it so important to be in unity?

First Reason:

God designed us to be one.

Romans 12:5 (NKJV)

“so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NKJV)

“For as the body is one and has many members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. (13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...

Second Reason:

Not only do our relationships suffer, but also growth in the Kingdom of God is hampered.

We have to make an effort to get along so we can function together as God intended us to do - for the sake of the Gospel.

John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 17:23 (NKJV)

“I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

It is difficult to see beyond our own culture, traditions, and convictions. If we concentrate on seeing Jesus in people it will help us stop judging them, and/or holding on to unforgiveness. It will make for a better quality in our relationships and bring more peace into our lives. We can examine our own habits and worldview as we are exposed to other, equally valid (or maybe even better), ways of doing life. As we appreciate the differences of others and embrace new ways of looking at the world, new and exciting possibilities will be opened to us. We will draw closer to each other, and closer to God.

Colossians 3:12-15 (NKJV)

