

Never Give *These*—Always Give *This*!

From the Gospel-Luke vi. 36ff.

*36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. 37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged : condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned : forgive , and ye shall be forgiven : 38 Give , and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down , and shaken together , and running over , shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again . 39 And he spake a parable unto them *, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? 40 The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. 41 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 42 Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.*

Jesus teaches us in this passage that when it comes to relationships, we must begin not with assumptions about others, but with assumptions about ourselves.

He begins today's Gospel with the words: *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful*. We are to imitate God, who, in spite of His holiness and His hatred for sin, does not choose to deal with mankind with harshness and vengeance. Instead, He is merciful. Mercy is always undeserved. *Mercy rejoiceth against judgment* (James 2:13). The New Testament is the declaration of the mercy of God in Christ, offered instead of deserved condemnation.

But from this introductory sentence, the focus turns to self-appraisal. *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged : condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned : forgive , and ye shall be forgiven*. We are told neither to judge nor to condemn, in order to avoid both judgment and condemnation ourselves. It is to be taken for granted, Jesus implies, that there are multiple reasons that any of us who approach others with an attitude of judgment and condemnation are liable ourselves to the same. And if we are not to receive our own just deserts, we must refuse to place ourselves in the incredibly precarious position of administering things to others that we have no right to administer.

Judgment and condemnation belong to serious criminals and offenders. They are major consequences for misdeeds. An action that brings someone as far as court must be considerably larger than a petty offense. Judgment in the legal sense means a thorough appraisal by either a judge or jury that is impartial enough to weigh the facts, and issue a verdict. And if the verdict is not "innocent", then it will result in some sort of condemnation, whether it be a fine, or imprisonment, or something worse.

Jesus' audiences consisted of many different kinds of hearts. His proud enemies were among them. Because they accounted themselves the only true stewards of the Law of God, they considered themselves absolutely exonerated of any condemnations the Law contained. In their own minds, they were given a pass, free and clear. Being the self-appointed dispensers of God's

judgment, they could both judge and condemn others at will and with impunity. They could not tolerate Christ's teaching, as it completely contradicted their self-estimation. There was nothing He could have either said or done that would have brought them even near the sort of examination of conscience that would have served to assist them in grasping His message.

But then there were the masses. Certainly it is to them that the Lord chiefly is speaking. These came to hear Jesus out of need. They were desperately seeking counsel and guidance to know how to order their lives in such a way as to please God and live in peace. From the day it became known that Messiah had come to earth, the air was filled with an unsettled sense of expectancy and anticipation. It had been hundreds of years since God had spoken actively through the Hebrew prophets. Holy Scripture taught that a day of judgment and condemnation was due to arrive, in which all men would be called before God to give account. Those among Jesus' hearers who were acutely conscious of these things hung upon His every word. The humility and honesty that arise out of lives that are lived very close to the ground enabled them to understand and receive His words.

When He said, *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged : condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned*, they would have agreed that they were worthy of the judgment and condemnation of both God and man: of God, because He is disappointed by us continually in countless ways, and of man, because we cause offense to others both knowingly and unknowingly. We dare not presume, then, to dispense that which we ourselves deserve.

Forgive , and ye shall be forgiven. Once again, before we make assumptions about others, we must assume something painful about ourselves: our need to be forgiven. Before I even step out of the front door of my life and enter the world of relationships, I must take a long look backward at the expanse of my own heart. Honesty compels me to conclude that I am in great debt to both God and man. "I have left undone those things which I ought to have done; And I have done those things which I ought not to have done..." as says the General Confession in Morning Prayer. It is the knowledge of the extent of my sins that impels me to be kind to others, and to offer them the forgiveness that I myself require.

I can think of nothing more in life that I would rather avoid than judgment and condemnation. Both of these consist of things that I run away from with all my might: the shame of public exposure; the very real possibility of the forfeiture of honor, wealth, position, a future; the finality associated with a penalty that cannot be altered, but was absolutely deserved. On the other hand, there is not one single thing in all the universe that is of any greater importance than forgiveness, for with forgiveness is the removal of consequences I had every reason to expect and to greatly fear; with forgiveness is the restoration of my life and soul to a place of essential inno-

cence. It is an opportunity for a new beginning, one I neither expected nor merited. And it is also something that I, in much smaller measure, can spend my whole life giving to others.

Give , and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down , and shaken together , and running over , shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again . This Gospel teaches us that there are certain things that we dare not give, lest they in fact be returned to us to deal with ourselves, gift-wrapped, post-paid, and multiplied tenfold... , judgment and condemnation being chief among them. But there is something we can offer which contains unsurpassable benefits both for the recipient and the giver, and that is forgiveness.

The etymology of this wonderful word *forgive* is worth noting. The Greek word translated here is used only in this once in the Gospels, and it means “to set free, to let go, to release”. The English word *forgive* is from an Old English root meaning “to give up desire or power to punish another”. What more joyous gift could there be to bestow upon others than to set them free! Imagine, walking along the grim, dark hallways of a prison, having been given a sacred key to open each and every door to allow the light and liberty of God’s love to pour into the awful shadows that have wrapped themselves around the hearts of others who have lived without hope of release.

But there is a tremendous irony we may well have to face. We were the very ones responsible for the imprisonment of those we have refused to forgive. We relished their bondage. We withheld their pardon, and thoroughly enjoyed it. “I can *never* forgive her for what she has done to me!” “I will *not* forget what he did, even though he has been long, long dead.” These very attitudes will become epitaphs written on the headstone of every life which has opted to give judgment and condemnation, instead of the gift of pardon.

Judge not... Condemn not... Forgive. Two things to always withhold, one thing to always dispense, and with the greatest possible generosity, since we ourselves have received it in like manner through the forgiveness that Christ has provided. A life thus lived will be abundantly rewarded with the favor of both God and man, poured into the lap with such abundance and joyous exuberance that it will spill all over the place!

May the Lord give us grace to please Him.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.