

“I” EXAM

From time to time we as disciples must go back and reacquaint ourselves with our teacher's teachings. Today's reading for certain is a basic teaching of Jesus that if we are to be called His disciples we must follow in His footsteps. It is important to our relationship with God and to those around us. So by taking an **“I” exam** we can be effective. Being a disciple does not mean we are successful when we follow a number of rules as the Pharisees had done. Success in a disciple's life is measured by the meaningful relationships we establish with God and others. Our life must be about serving one another in love, not because we have to, because then we are back to just rules. However, when we serve and love because we were first loved then we are no longer following rules but the example of our teacher, Jesus Christ, and can be called His disciples.

We can all recall when mom repeated the words - *“judge not, lest you be judged”*, which is at the very beginning of our reading today. There have been many discussions about judging and what exactly it is. The word used here in Matthew translates “to condemn”.

In Jesus' time the Jewish people knew from their Rabbis the saying *“He who judges his neighbor favorably will be judged favorably by God”*. This was among six great works which brought a person credit in this world and the world to come. They were to study the Law, visit the sick, devotion in prayer, the education of children in the Law, and **thinking the best of people**. The Jewish people knew that kindness in judgment is nothing less than a sacred duty. History shows us numerous times the misjudgments of people that even from an earthly view we should know not to judge at all!

Now there are verses in the Bible we must include and not just leave this, as the only reference taking it out of context. In *1 Thessalonians 5* it talks about helping people and one thing is to admonish the idle, not condemn but help. When we love our neighbor we care for them but we do not ignore sin. With love we offer help. However, one of the most common phrases thrown back at us is “Don't you dare judge me!” Why? Likely that person does not want to be held accountable for their actions. Love does not desire a person to keep going on a destructive path. Another measuring stick I have heard is to recognize whether you are judging or not is, “if you are not offering a solution then you are part of the problem”.

There are solid reasons why we should NEVER judge another. First, we never know all the facts or the whole person. The old phrase comes to mind – do not judge unless you have walked in their shoes. We all come from different backgrounds, and because of it we have a frame or prism we see things through from it. Very few of us know what it is to be starving, hungry yes, but starving no. Much of the world lives to survive while we complain about really meaningless details. We can

turn a faucet on and water – hot or cold comes, no walking miles for buckets of water and then having to heat it up for hot water. People are affected in so many different ways, maybe even by the same type of event – a loss of a loved one, an accident or many other things. Which means we cannot judge, condemn, them.

How many times have we heard stories on the news about how surprised friends or family are at actions taken by someone they thought they knew? ***We can judge the actions of a person but definitely not the person!*** It comes back to that six Jewish great works, one being thinking the best of people. And to turn that around, would we not want people to think the best of us even when we are having a bad day? We have come through the door at Centennial, maybe after a sleepless night, an illness or an argument and may be not so chipper but don't we appreciate the people around us treating us with kindness and thinking the best of us? This is one reason we are not to judge!

The *second reason* we are not to judge is that it is next to impossible for anyone to be strictly impartial in their judgment. How many times have we met people at a gathering and almost immediately drawn conclusions about them without even meeting them? Judge the way they walk, the clothes they are wearing, or any other minor detail we can find that turns into a judgment call. Like any church over the years there was a time when visitors came through the door and judgments were made. There is something interesting and sad about that – the visitors likely felt it. They made have felt good about the service, but there was a feeling of not being accepted for who they were even though no one knows who they really were. I talked about timeless truths last week and Scripture never ceases to amaze me with how relevant it is today. Check out verse of *John 7:24* "*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*"

Last week it warmed my heart, we had a couple visit and they stayed for fellowship, sitting with three other couples and talking, laughing and eating. Love does those kinds of things. A trait of love that I seldom hear mentioned but believe is important is love is hospitable, it welcomes--it warms the air around it and draws people into it. That to me is a thought I ponder, when Jesus met people, did His love and compassion just "flood" the air and draw people to Him? There is a story that in old Greek culture if an important or difficult trial was held, the trial was held in the dark so judge and jury could not see the person on trial as not to be influenced by anything other than the facts of the case. By human nature we are not impartial people. It is why God is the only one to judge.

A third reason not to judge closely relates back to what I just said. No one is good enough to judge any other person. The verse in *John 8* "*who is without sin cast the first stone*" can be applied to all

areas of our lives. The picture Jesus gives us in these verses about logs and specks in each other's eyes continues to drive home the point of not judging.

Today in our world judging has been elevated to a privilege or right! Name any area – sports, politics, relatives, or even the church! The problem I see in this is a type of bait-and-switch. God is concerned in His loving way for you, me and everyone. However, His desire is very clear from these verses that we take care of our own problems so we can help others with theirs in the same loving way He deals with us. Even though God certainly is qualified to judge us, He doesn't, because of Jesus' work accomplished on the cross. In the book of *James 4* he talks about judging and speaking against another and "the fact this is only One lawgiver and judge, so who are you to judge your neighbor?" Despite the warning not to judge others Jesus goes on to say to take the log out of our eye and then we can help take the speck out of another's eye. These verses certainly point out that with an "I" **exam** then we are able to use discernment and help others with their problems. We can discern the problem whatever it may be and then help in a loving and compassionate way. With an "I" **exam** we can check our motivation and know whether the motives are right or wrong.

An incorrect motive may be to control something or someone. Remember when the Pharisees wanted to condemn Jesus' followers or at times when the disciples mother wanted her sons to sit in their proper places in heaven, judging the other disciples not worthy. You have likely known in your time in church that person or people who have a tendency to judge who should sit on this committee or that board or to be a teacher in Sunday School. A question we must then ask is "How many people have left a church or the church entirely because they have seen the "inner workings" or politics and will have nothing to do with it?? Right now we may nod our head in agreement, but what happens when we conduct the business of the church, do we just toss all the teaching of our Teacher?

People want to belong; they generally want to participate in the life of the church or whatever organization they have chosen to join. If we all applied that one element of the six great works - *to think the best of people* - maybe we would have more people willing to participate. We all have come from various background, and we see things differently whether it be a problem, a method to getting there or a solution. Honor one another in love and service. Don't prejudge because it may be a young person, a new person or an old timer! We all have something to contribute to this body of Christ that is Centennial.

Frequently we judge to elevate ourselves in another's eye or in our own eyes. Somehow we feel superior about ourselves when we judge or really condemn someone to an inferior position. Really? And how long does that feeling last when someone does it to you? I have to wonder in the

political arena how candidates or consultants heap on each other condemnations in order to elevate their own position?

Enough on negative motives-- the latter verses of this passage don't let us off the hook in regards to helping people. A key reason to judge in the best sense of the word is with discernment so we will keep from falling or being led astray. We do have to judge what is good or evil.

We can disciple and help others with the same love and compassion Jesus Christ had for the sinners and outcasts of His day. When we do our **"I" exam** and work on getting the specks out, then because of those experiences and those trials we are better able to understand and help others without judging them, because we know where they are coming from!

Think of the times we have verbally condemned someone because they *always* do that or they *never* do that, then as soon as those words come out of our mouth the person does just the opposite! The Scripture reminds us in *1 Timothy 3:16* - *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right."*

And another verse that is even more helpful when we want to "jump to conclusions" and judge someone and is found in *James 1:19* - *"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry."* Frequently I talk of having spiritual eyes to "see" and spiritual ears to hear the things of God. When we walk in the Spirit we will have the ability to "see" as Jesus did, after all He did not judge or condemn the woman at the well for her sin but He did make her aware that He knew. The challenge for us today is to not judge in order that we may not be judged. We are to help others to remove the speck from their eye after we have removed the log from ours.

When was the last time you took an **"I" exam**? Daily checkups are good for us all in order to be His disciples and follow His example!

A young couple moves into a new neighborhood. The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbor hanging the wash outside. 'That laundry is not very clean', she said. 'She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap' Her husband looked on, but remained silent. Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments. About one month later, the woman was surprised to see nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: 'Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this?' The husband said, 'I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows.'

And so it is with life. What we see when watching others depends on the purity of the window through which we look. Take an "I" exam and see for yourself! Amen.