

RT Kendall: Christian, Stop Playing God

I could take you to the very spot—a table in the Duke Humphrey wing of the Bodleian Library in Oxford. I was in the process of discovering the works of the great William Perkins (1558-1602), an Elizabethan Puritan. I came in that day feeling very discouraged, an inferior compared with the other students at Oxford University. Here I was from the hills of Kentucky, a place not exactly known for its centers of academic excellence. *You don't belong here*, my mind suggested—and at that moment, my eyes fell on the words of William Perkins:

“Don't believe the devil even when he tells the truth.”

Criticism that is uncalled-for, unfair or unjust—even *if it is true*—should not be uttered. The fact that what you say is true does not necessarily make it right to say. Often Satan's accusations are true: He is an expert at being a judge. He is even called “the accuser of our brothers and sisters” (Rev. 12:10). You may be pointing your finger and speaking words of truth, but you may unwittingly be an instrument of the devil as you speak.

This kind of uncalled-for criticism is what Jesus means by judging when He says, “Do not judge.” He is not telling us to ignore what is wrong: He is saying not to administer any uncalled-for criticism—that is, criticism that is unfair or unjustified.

The word “judge” comes from the Greek word *krino*, which basically means “to distinguish.” Making a distinction between two things is often a good thing to do. Being discriminate can be prudent, and it can be wise. The apostle Paul said “The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things” (1

Cor. 2:15, NIV). We are told to make righteous judgments. But what Jesus is talking about here is judging *people* and unfairly criticizing them. It is our way of playing God.

One acrostic I have found helpful is built on the word "NEED.: When speaking to or about another person, ask yourself if what you are about to say will meet the person's need.

Necessary—Is it necessary to say this?

Encourage—Will this encourage the person? Will it make him or her feel better?

Edify—Will it edify? Will what you say build the person up and make him or her stronger?

Dignify—Will it dignify that person? Jesus treated other people with a sense of dignity.

For years I have read Luke 6:37a every day; it says, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged." I made the decision many years ago to read it every day, and I still do. Every single day. Why have I chosen this particular verse to focus on? Because judging is probably my greatest weakness.

Judging other people is almost always counterproductive. When I judge someone else, I may be thinking, *What I want to do to change this person, straighten this person out.* But it has the opposite effect almost every time! Sooner or later it will backfire. The other person will become offended, and the situation will not be resolved.

The degree to which we resist the temptation to judge will be the degree to which we ourselves are largely spared of being judged: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matt. 7:1). In Matthew this statement is given as a warning, but in Luke it is given as a promise.

"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).

Judging people is the next result of unforgiveness, and it entails elbowing in on God's exclusive territory. Deuteronomy 32:35a ("It is mine to avenge; I will repay") is quoted twice in the New Testament (Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30). That means it's not *your* job! Judging is God's prerogative, nobody else's. To move in on the territory of the eternal judge will get His attention—but not the kind of attention you want!

Read Matthew 7, and you'll realize that Jesus will not allow you to play God. He is the ultimate judge, and you must be extremely careful not to trespass into His territory. {eo}

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