

Men of God Make Everyone Feel Guilty and Judged

John 5:19-24 (NIV84)

¹⁹ Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. ²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ²² Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. ²⁴ "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

In Jerusalem there was a pool called Bethesda. Stories had circulated that an angel would stir up the waters and the first person to enter the pool would be healed of whatever ailed them. Thus, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed congregated at this pool hoping for a chance to be healed. One such man who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. Then along comes Jesus. He simply tells the man to get up, pick up your mat, and go. And the man did.

This happened on the Sabbath, the seventh day, the God-ordained day of rest. So when the Jews saw the man carrying his mat, he was met with harsh judgment. "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." (verse 10) The healed man pointed the Jews to Jesus as the one who told him to do this. For the Jews, the judgment was clear. Jesus was breaking the Sabbath Day by doing work like this, and he was encouraging other people to do the same. This Jesus had to be stopped. So the Jews took their judgment to Jesus and persecuted him.

Jesus responded to them by saying, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." (verse 17) Then they tried all the harder to kill Jesus not only because Jesus was breaking the Sabbath in their judgment, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Really? You want to kill Jesus, condemn him for healing a man who had been incapable of walking for some 38 years? You want to condemn a man because he picked up a mat and walked? Oh no! He worked on the Sabbath. How wrong of you do something so simple as pick up a mat and be healed. And we are thinking (judging), "Get over yourself, Jews! Who are you to judge!?"

Being more charitable to the Jews, you can kind of understand the good motive behind their actions. They were so concerned about keeping the Sabbath as to condemn anyone who at looked to be violating it. It looks like the Jews value God's commands over the commands of men, that they care more about the spiritual aspects of life than the physical. They were trying to uphold God's honor by keeping his laws without any dereliction of duty.

But who are we to judge? Judging is a very negative topic. If you say anything that even remotely sounds like you are calling a person out or judging them on what they are doing, you better be ready for the anger, the hurt, and the indignation. You don't know what that person has gone through. You don't know what happened to them today at work or at school. You don't know the kind of stress that they are under. You don't know what's been going on in their family life, their latest diagnosis from the doctors. How dare you judge them!

Judging just seems like a bad word. Either people judge out of complete ignorance, that the person has no idea what goes on in my life and is thus in no position to judge me, or they judge as a way to say that they are holier than me, better than me. Either way, the general impression we give off as a society is that judging is wrong. Who are you to judge?

But is there a deeper reason why we say, "Who are you to judge?" a deeper reason as to why we have such disdain for being judged by others? On a TV show, a pastor says, "Folks like a man of God," to which the main character says, "No, they don't. Men of God make everyone feel guilty and judged." Is the problem we have concerning being judged really about the judgment being passed or is it about the guilty feeling you have after having been judged? Is the little voice in your head prodding you to see the truth of the judgment, that the judgment was not entirely inaccurate? Is that little voice slowly convicting you of the judgment that was made, that this person actually hit the nail on the head? Is the real problem that we have about judging is that the judgment was right and that makes us feel guilty?

None of us like to bear guilt. We are taught to get rid of it, to not carry it around. Don't dwell on it. And if we are truly trying to be good and do the right thing, that judgment feels like a kick in the teeth, even if it is true. It's like bringing back all those guilty feelings we had worked so hard to bury. We don't want to hear about it. We don't want to feel bad about it. We don't want to feel guilty and judged.

No wonder so many people revile God's Word because it does make you feel really guilty and judged. That's one of the things God's Word does: it shows me my sins as I measure myself up to the perfection demanded of me. I am unable to meet the requirements. I am not good enough for God. And he will judge me accordingly, rightly. He will judge me as to whether or not I obeyed him perfectly. The judgment does not hinge on giving it the ol' college try or putting your best foot forward or just trying really hard. No. God requires, demands, no slip ups, no mulligans, no do-overs. Instead of owning the guilt and the judgment against my lack of perfection and actually dealing with it, I fight against it. I say, "Who are you to judge?" as if you cannot possibly be right in doing so.

Interestingly, Jesus does not answer the Jews persecuting him by saying, "Who are you to judge?" He doesn't ask them a question as if to avoid feeling all guilty and judged. No, he answers that question without asking it. "You judge me. You want me to feel guilty as if I sinned by healing this man who had been an invalid for 38 years." "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does." (verse 19-20a) "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father." (verses 22-23a)

Jews, you are right. We need to be judged. But who is the judge? Human judging doesn't work so well. So, who is even capable of judging? Jesus tell us that God the Father has entrusted all judgment to God the Son, but God the Son can do nothing by himself. This is the mystery of the three-in-one Godhead. They cannot be separated. They cannot operate independent of each other. So, when the Son judges, it is as if the Father judges you. Jesus is found not guilty in regards to breaking the Sabbath by healing this man. But what about you? How do you measure up in God's judgment? Do you honor the Son as you do the Father?

All the sudden, the tables have turned. The Jews went from being the judges to now being judged. And they are being judged rightly from God. Now the guilt creeps in because they were indignant against Jesus, thought he was the one who was doing wrong. But now they see the fact that they do not honor God because they do not listen to Jesus or honor him as they do the Father.

Are you feeling all guilty and judged? You've had a lurking suspicion. You've tried to drown out that voice in your head that convicts you, but the guilt remains. You have not done all that you can do. You have left things undone. You have not been perfect. You are judged guilty. God's Word has judged you, not my words. God says you deserve condemnation. His Word has made the same verdict against me.

But Jesus does not leave us or the Jews there with that realization, feeling all guilty and judged with no solution. Instead, he goes on to show us the greater things that he was talking about. "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." (verse 21) "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (verse 24)

Jesus can do this because he brought healing to us for our guilty and judged consciences. He sacrificed himself to take away our sins. Our judgment has changed. Instead of the death sentence that we so rightly deserve, that God the judge has given us a full pardon. He has declared us "not guilty." This is the benefit we receive from Jesus' work.

We heard in our second lesson from Hebrews "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (Hebrews 9:27-28) This is the word of Jesus. This is the Word that we believe. So we have crossed over from condemnation, from being all guilty and judged, to being declared "not guilty" and given eternal life. By what Jesus has done, we have crossed over from death to life.

Brother and sisters, I know that none of us like feeling all guilty and judged, but God has the solution. He actually deals with our guilt. Jesus, the Judge, has given you life. He has declared you not guilty on account of his work, and his judgment is just. By Jesus' words, we have crossed over from death to eternal life. When our judgment day comes, we need not fear it. We already know the verdict. There is no condemnation for us anymore. Jesus declares you "not guilty." Amen.