

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: DO NOT JUDGE WRONGFULLY

Scripture: Book of Mormon, Moroni 7:13-17.

Behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that they may know good from evil; wherefore I shew unto you the way to judge; for everything which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ: Wherefore, ye may know with a perfect knowledge, it is of God; but whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil .. And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge, ye shall also be judged.

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In the sermon on the mount Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." This is an excellent example of the sort of Bible verse which can be completely misunderstood unless it is taken in context. In fact, on another occasion Jesus seemingly said exactly the opposite, if you take that saying out of context also; for he commanded: "Judge righteous judgment." (John 7:24) The context of both these verses shows that they are saying essentially the same thing -- that the prohibition was against judging harshly, critically, unrighteously, unmercifully, unsympathetically, without full knowledge of motives and background as well as of all the facts.

Jesus illustrated his cautions about judgment by asking why his listeners tried to take a speck out of another's eye when they had a huge building beam in their own eye. The prohibition is against judging another harshly for the very same things you are doing yourself. It is against the kind of judgment rendered by the men who brought to Jesus a woman taken in adultery, and who were told, "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone!" It is the kind of judgment exercised by David, who when he heard Nathan's parable of the man who had robbed his neighbor of his only ewe lamb, declared: "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die," failing to recognize himself in the parable until Nathan said: "Thou art the man."

When Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," he did not mean, then, that we should never judge other things or other people at all. Life is a constant succession of choices, each one of which requires some act of judgment. There is no escaping the obligations of judging whether things are right or wrong, good or bad, worthy or unworthy, true or false, temporary or eternal. There is no escaping the obligation of judging our own acts by which character is shaped.

This commandment of Jesus, taken in its proper context, does not prohibit us even from judging other people. In fact, such judgment is not only our right, but sometimes it is our duty. When the peace and safety and well-being of the community or the good name of the church demand it, we may be called to sit in judgment upon an offender against civil or ecclesiastical law, and even to prescribe the degree of his punishment. This kind of judgment must be rendered in love, in sympathy, in understanding, and in righteousness; but very frequently justice demands that some kind of judgment be given even though through human frailty it be something less than perfect.

In dealing with people, it is constantly necessary for us to pass some sort of judgment upon them. No man or woman in his right mind would choose a partner to share his life in marriage without passing careful judgment upon the

qualifications of the one under consideration. No man would choose a business partner without passing some sort of judgment upon his character, his ability, his honesty, his dependability, and his financial responsibility. No one would employ the services of a lawyer, a doctor, an architect, an engineer, a carpenter, a handy man, or any other kind of professional man or workman, without first passing some sort of judgment upon his integrity, his skill, and his ability to do the job required. Every time you cast a vote for one man, or against his opponents, you are judging those men.

Our problem, then, is not to discover how to refrain from all judgment, but how to judge righteous judgment. There is one aspect of judging righteous judgment which is often overlooked. We quote Jesus' statement, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged," and usually interpret it to mean that if we judge others harshly or wrongfully or critically, or unjustly, God will judge us with the same harsh sort of judgment. The meaning which we often overlook is that we shall receive the same kind of judgment we have given, not because God is unjust, but because he is just -- because the kind of judgment we make not only indicates the kind of people we are, but actually determines the kind of people we are to become.

Suppose, by way of illustration, that a man sets himself up as expert and a good judge of fine art. He views the work of various artists. Some he pronounces good, some he pronounces bad. His judgments are uninformed, harsh, critical, unmerciful, wrong. As he continues this kind of bad judgment day after day and year after year, will he become a better critic or a worse critic than he was in the beginning? Obviously he will become worse and worse as he continues to practice his mistakes. Then when several centuries have passed, and time has passed its edict, he will be judged as a critic on the basis of the judgments he made while alive. If most of those judgments are wrong, he will go down in history as a bad critic. If they are right, he will go down in history as a good critic.

The same thing applies to the artist himself. If he has made good judgments and wise choices of color, composition, subject matter, and technique for his paintings, he will be judged on the basis of his own judgments, and will go down in history as a great artist.

The justments you render today on the actions you choose, the principles you follow, the causes you espouse, the loyalties you assume, the friends and companions and leaders you associate with -- all these judgments will be the basis of God's eternal judgment of your character. If you have judged all things wisely, reverently, and well, with the same judgment you have judged, you shall be judged. If you have judged carelessly, unrighteously, rebelliously, God's eternal judgment of your character will be to restore to you exactly the kind of things you have chosen, or exactly the kind of judgment you have made in life.

How may we judge righteous judgment? The reading we have brought to you from the Book of Mormon points the way. Some portion of the Spirit of God is given to every man -- some glimmerings of conscience by which he may know good from evil. Everything that invites to do good, that persuades to believe in Christ is of God, and is good -- for God is the source of all good. Anything that invites or entices men to do evil, that persuades men not to believe in Christ, is evil, and being evil is of the devil.

Everything is to be judged by the light of Christ. Every man is to be judged by the perfect example of Christ. With this light available, if he judges good to be evil, or evil good, he must be judged according to the same warped judgment he himself has built into his life. If Christ is the Son of God, and the Savior of men, then he who judges him to be unworthy of man's obedience or loyalty or love must be judged by the kind of judgment he has judged. "And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully, for with that same judgment which ye judge, ye shall also be judged."