Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 123

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Matthew 7:1.

“The effort to earn salvation by one’s own works inevitably leads men to pile up human exactions as a barrier against sin. For, seeing that they fail to keep the law, they will devise rules and regulations of their own to force themselves to obey. All this turns the mind away from God to self. His love dies out of the heart, and with it perishes love for his fellow men. A system of human invention, with its multitudinous exactions, will lead its advocates to judge all who come short of the prescribed human standard. The atmosphere of selfish and narrow criticism stifles the noble and generous emotions, and causes men to become self-centered judges and petty spies.

“The Pharisees were of this class. They came forth from their religious services, not humbled with a sense of their own weakness, not grateful for the great privileges that God had given them. They came forth filled with spiritual pride, and their theme was, ‘Myself, my feelings, my knowledge, my ways.’ Their own attainments became the standard by which they judged others. Putting on the robes of self-dignity, they mounted the judgment seat to criticize and condemn.”

THE REAL ISSUE

The members of the church at Bulldog Heights weren’t your everyday, run-of-the-mill congregation. When they saw a problem with the way things were being run in their church, they went right after it teeth first. No beating around the bush for this bunch.

In fact, that’s why someone at a church board meeting one night brought up the issue of jewelry. If ever there was a topic that sparked instant discussion, this seemed to be it. Interestingly enough, there didn’t seem to be any disagreement over the gravity of the problem. The real controversy centered, rather, on what exactly should be done about “this obscene encroachment of rampant paganism itself into the vulnerable inner recesses of our very midst,” as one outraged member put it. “Pierced ears indeed!” he cried. “Next thing you know they’ll be piercing their noses and who knows what else!”

One pugnacious board member suggested placing two burly deacons at each entrance to the building to turn away anyone wearing jewelry who tried to storm the place. But then the chair observed that young girls—and boys, too, for that matter—could hide their pierced ears under long hair that someone would have to
lift aside to check.

It was at this moment that the idea of an electronic jewelry alarm bubbled to the surface of the deliberation. The boardroom fell silent in a collective thrill. Here was a genuine twenty-first-century example of inspiration if ever there was one!

It took a little more than six months for the board to find a system that claimed to do the job adequately. *The time is coming,* they thought, *when we'll be able to weed all these "jewelry junkies" from our midst!*

At last one morning everything was in place. The jewelry alarms had been installed *and* the burly deacons stationed at each entrance. The word had gone out the week before that no one—*no one*—would be allowed in the sanctuary without passing through the jewelry alarm. It didn’t take very long to put the new system to the test.

Chaos.

Bells and whistles and sirens and flashing red lights. Belt buckles, watches, tie pins, brooches, barrettes, money clips, pens, key chains—you name it. Whatever was made of metal set off the alarms. When it was all over, only 14 people got through. Not one of the deacons themselves passed the test. “Well,” one of them commented, “there goes this morning’s program.”

It was a humbled bunch of members who met in the emergency board meeting that evening in Bulldog Heights. *Well, now what?* Fortunately, the board members made the only inspired decision they’d made in months. They knelt together and asked for God’s leading through the valley of the shadow of darkness that they’d created for themselves. And after much further discussion—and prayer—they came to the conclusion, “We’ve been worrying about changing other people, but I guess we’d better take a little closer look at how we might change ourselves.” (Adapted from Gary B. Swanson, *The Moose, the Goose, and the Kingdom of God* [Review and Herald® Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD, 2000], pp. 66-68.)

1. Why do you think that the issue of jewelry is such a hot topic in our church?

   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

2. What other issues/behaviors do you think we as a church try to "control"?

   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

3. How can we not judge others yet also remain faithful to how the Lord calls us to live: *in* the world yet not *of* the world?
4. What would the church look like if we always prayed first, humbling seeking the Lord's will, before making any major decisions?

“Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 124

“The people partook largely of the same spirit, intruding upon the province of conscience and judging one another in matters that lay between the soul and God. It was in reference to this spirit and practice that Jesus said, ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged.’ That is, do not set yourself up as a standard. Do not make your opinions, your views of duty, your interpretations of Scripture, a criterion for others and in your heart condemn them if they do not come up to your ideal. Do not criticize others, conjecturing as to their motives and passing judgment upon them.

“‘Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.’ 1Corinthians 4:5. We cannot read the heart. Ourselves faulty, we are not qualified to sit in judgment upon others. Finite men can judge only from outward appearance. To Him alone who knows the secret springs of action, and who deals tenderly and compassionately, is it given to decide the case of every soul.

“‘Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.’ Romans 2:1. Thus those who condemn or criticize others, proclaim themselves guilty, for they do the same things. In condemning others, they are passing sentence upon themselves, and God declares that this sentence is just. He accepts their own verdict against themselves.

“‘These clumsy feet, still in the mire,
Go crushing blossoms without end;
These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust
Among the heartstrings of a friend.’”

Romans 14:10 (New International Version)
“You then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s Judgment seat.”

John 7:24 (New International Version)

“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.”

Joshua’s dad wasn’t faithful to his mother, so they divorced. In the years after the divorce, Joshua acted out his anger at his situation by getting into trouble with the law. After a few years, he straightened out his life. He was doing well in school, had an after-school job and a girlfriend, and was being considered for an athletic scholarship for a local private school. Eventually he might even receive a college scholarship, which would mean that his mother wouldn’t have to worry about paying for college. Then some money was stolen from the place where he worked. Everyone acted as if Joshua had gone back to his old ways. Was that fair of them? Why or why not?

Go to http://guidemagazine.org/rtf to post your answers. Your thoughts and feelings may seem clearer to you when you write them down, so we’ve provided space for you here as well. You may also wish to share them with your class later. Be up front and honest.

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Acts 6:7, 8 (New International Version)

“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

“Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.”
This week our lesson is about withholding judgment. Sometimes, to understand judgment, it helps to know how many ways that word is used. Below are eight words that are associated with the word judgment. Finding the meaning of each word will help you better understand this week’s lesson topic. (You can go to www.merriam-webster.com to find meanings.)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
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1. From “Today’s Reading,” can you tell what made the Jews so angry with Stephen?

   ____________________________

   ____________________________

2. What makes it clear that Stephen was doing God’s will as he spoke?

   ____________________________

   ____________________________

3. Who was watching?

   ____________________________

   ____________________________
1 Samuel 16 (New International Version)

“The LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.’

“But Samuel said, ‘How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me.’

“The LORD said, ‘Take a heifer with you and say, “I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.” Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.’

“Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, ‘Do you come in peace?’

“Samuel replied, ‘Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.’ Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

“When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.’

“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’

“Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, ‘The LORD has not chosen this one either.’ Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, ‘Nor has the LORD chosen this one.’ Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, ‘The LORD has not chosen these.’ So he asked Jesse, ‘Are these all the sons you have?’

“‘There is still the youngest,’ Jesse answered, ‘but he is tending the sheep.’

“Samuel said, ‘Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.’

“So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features.

“Then the LORD said, ‘Rise and anoint him; he is the one.’

“So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah.

“Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.

“Saul’s attendants said to him, ‘See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the harp. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes upon you, and you will feel better.’
“So Saul said to his attendants, ‘Find someone who plays well and bring him to me.’

“One of the servants answered, ‘I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him.’

“Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, ‘Send me your son David, who is with the sheep.’ So Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul.

“David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers. Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, ‘Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him.’

“Whenver the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.”

SO WHAT?

These are the years when what your friends think of you is probably more important than even what the adults in your life think of you. At this time in your life, you probably have a specially chosen group of friends to hang with. They probably share your interests, likes and dislikes, way of dressing, ideas about things to do in your free time and music that you listen to. And there may not seem to be room in your life for many other people. And that’s OK up to a certain point.

Good friends will help you get through this difficult time in your life when it seems as if your mind and body aren’t in agreement with each other about anything. Because you may feel awkward within yourself, you may not want to be around someone else who seems awkward in your social setting. Unfortunately, instead of being compassionate toward those who are unlike you, you may tend to exclude those people from your life based on what they seem like on the outside.

Jesus says we have to get over it. He was the ultimate example of not judging and not excluding. He treated everyone with respect and concern—even when He pointed out things in their lives that were clearly against God’s law. You can make sure that people are included in group gatherings, that you refuse to participate when others talk about them, and that you give gentle hints that might help them get along better with others.

And if you don’t? One day you may be in their position, and they may treat you the same way you’ve treated them. God says so.

1. What was Samuel doing?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________
In the Bible are texts telling us how God feels about judging. Below are a few of them. Please fill in the blanks, using www.Biblegateway.com.

1. “‘Do not ________ or you too will be _________. For in the same way you _______ others, you will be ________, and with the _________ you use, it will be ___________ to you. Why do you look at the _________ of ____________ in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the _________ in your _______ _______?’” (Matthew 7:1-3, NIV).

2. “‘The Father __________ no one, but has ___________ all _________ to the _________’” (John 5:22, NIV).

3. “‘Stop ____________ by mere __________, and make a right ___________” (John 7:24, NIV).

4. “‘You __________ by human ______________, I pass ______________ on no one’” (John 8:15, NIV).

5. “‘At whatever point you __________ the other, you are __________ yourself, because you who pass ___________________ do the same things.’” (Romans 2:1, NIV).
6. “Speak and act as those who are going to be ________ by the law that gives freedom, because ______________ without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been ___________. ________ triumphs over _____________!” (James 2:12, 13, NIV).

7. “Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks _________ his brother or _________ him speaks _________ the _________ and judges it. When you ________ the ________, you are not keeping it, but sitting in _______________ on it. There is only one _________ and ____________, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to ______ your neighbor?” (James 4:11, 12, NIV).

Thursday | Today’s Reading

**Acts 8:1-3 (New International Version)**

“And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”


“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’

“‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked.

“‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’

“The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he
was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.”

**WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME?**

God says He, through His Son Jesus Christ, is the only one who can judge people. And rightly so. They created us, and Jesus lived the life that is ours in this world. No one else in history has had the range of experience of being tempted and rejected as He has. Only He understands the experience of every person who has ever lived and will ever live.

So if we can’t have Jesus’ experience, what gives us the right to judge? Nothing and no one. All we can do is to ask Him for the grace to look at others through His eyes, to listen to others’ stories about their lives and act accordingly. Even when we can tell that they are doing something God’s law forbids, Jesus asks us not to condemn but to help.

And what if we don’t? Jesus Himself tells us that in the same way we judge others, we will be judged. Think of a time when you’ve had the experience of being wrongly judged. How did it feel? Remember, God is a God of second chances. If you’ve judged someone unfairly before, determine through His power to not do it again.

1. From “Today’s Reading,” tell what effect did the stoning of Stephen had on Saul.

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

2. Why did Saul feel right about judging the disciples of Jesus?

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

3. What stopped Saul?

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

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**Acts 9:10-31 (New International Version)**

“In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’”
“‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered.

“The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.’

“‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.’

“But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’

“Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

“Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, ‘Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?’ Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

“After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

“When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Remember the proverb: “Don’t judge any man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins”? Think of experiences you have had being judged or judging others.
Think of some other ways to express experiencing what someone else has experienced in order to understand them. For example, *Don’t judge a person until you have eaten the food he has eaten.* Grab a pencil, and write out some of your ideas in the following space.

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From “Today’s Reading,” please answer the following questions:

1. What made others judge Saul?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

2. What changed everything?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

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