

“Judge, Jury, and Executioner”

(A Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Text: Romans 14:1-12

Lectionary Texts: Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 114; Matthew 18:21-35; Romans 14:1-12

Subject: Unqualified Judges.

Desired Response: Learn not to be judgmental.

How To: Understand why you might be this way and heed the strong warning of Scripture to change.

How Long: All assignments should be completed by the next week or two.

Sermon in a Sentence: “God wants His children to recognize that He alone has the role of judge.”

Worship Theme: “The application of God’s love prevents His children from judging harshly.”

Imagine this scenario: You are driving along in the right lane of an interstate highway at the posted speed limit of 65 mph—because you are a Christian, and you would never exceed the speed limit— and suddenly, a car full of teenagers driven by a teenaged boy passes you doing nearly 80. As soon as he passes you, the teen driver cuts into your lane and slows to 40 mph, causing you to hit your brakes. He then exits at the next off-ramp, about 50 yards ahead. How do you react?

Reaction A: “Oh, I feel sorry for that poor boy. He must be in a hurry to assist his mother, or another relative in distress. In addition, he must be from out-of-town, as he just realized that this is his exit. Whatever the case, I hope he arrives in time to be of help, and does not get lost. I will say a little prayer for him right now, that both he and his family will be OK. What a nice lad, to rush to help in time of need. I hope he has a good day.”

Reaction B: “What a stupid moron! Learn to drive, you idiot! Cut your hair, and lose the nose-ring!”

Did you identify with either of those reactions? If you are honest enough to admit that the second reaction might prove more typical of you, please understand that you are in very good company. You are a member of the “Not-So-Perfect Club.”

Now, turn to the person closest to you and say, “Guess what—I am not perfect.” If you say that to a stranger, I guarantee you the individual will back away, but watch you very carefully. If you say it to a family member or friend, that person will roll his or her eyes, and also very likely watch you very carefully.

Congratulations on joining the “Not-So-Perfect Club.” May I be so bold as to suggest that you are also probably a member of another club? This is the “SIJOP Club.” And, many of us are more active in this club than we are in our church, PTA, Rotary, or bowling league. This is the “Sometimes I Judge Other People Club.”

I may not know these people I judge, or their backgrounds, or their experiences, I may not know what they are going through in their lives, I may not know what values or beliefs they hold dear. But, I will most certainly evaluate them according to my own values and beliefs. I know that God made these people differently from the way He made me. But, He certainly could have done a better job with them.

Does the Bible say I should not judge other people? It all depends; do you also wish to be judged?

- Matthew 7:1: *Do not judge, lest you be judged yourselves.*
- Luke 6:37: *Do not pass judgment, and you will not be judged.*
- Romans 2:1: *In that you judge another, you condemn yourself.*
- Romans 14:10: *Why do you judge your brother? We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.*
- James 4:12: *Who are you who judges your neighbor?*

Many of us fancy ourselves to be the “Judge of the Universe—The Voice of All Humanity and Speaker of Universal Truth.” I used to jokingly refer to myself by that title when I was about fourteen years old. Then, I came to realize that it was not joke and I was actually acting as if that title was true. How about you? Have you ever elevated yourself to such a throne?

“She should have better control over her children. They are a disgrace.”

“Why does he wear bow ties? Doesn’t he realize they make him look like a clown?”

“He thinks he is so special. I can’t stand him.”

“She is way too overweight to be wearing those slacks.”

“He looks absolutely hideous in that shirt and tie. They don’t match!”

“Look at him! A second-helping of dessert! Doesn’t he realize he’s already too fat?”

“There he goes! He’s dominating the conversation again! Doesn’t he realize that other people would like to talk, too?”

“They contributed to the collection for the missionary. But, I just know it was so they would be recognized.”

“Senator so-and-so doesn’t care about the poor. He just wants to be re-elected.”

What compels us to want to make judgments against other people who do things differently from the way we do? What drives us to want to be the judge of the universe? The obvious answer: “sin”! But, let’s look into to this matter a little further.

First of all, the Apostle Paul wrote these words about this very subject, found in Romans 14:1-12:

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must

not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. 4 Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.”

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Paul’s words seem quite clear. In fact, it’s obvious: “God wants His children to recognize that He alone has the role of judge.” Again: “God wants His children to recognize that He alone has the role of judge.”

What might prompt us to act as “Judge of the Universe—The Voice of All Humanity and Speaker of Universal Truth”? Let me suggest three possible reasons:

1. (The first possible reason why we hasten to judge others is)

Low Self-Esteem

And, this may well be the cause of all the others. Many of us have low self-esteem. We need to compensate for our inferior feelings by belittling others and finding fault with them. In his book, *Fire Up Your Life! Living with Nothing to Prove, Nothing to Hide, and Nothing to Lose*, Christian author and radio talk show host Ken Davis asserts that many of us suffer from low self-esteem, and therefore we feel we have to prove our self-worth through accomplishments or wealth or power. He goes on to state:

But self-esteem is not a sin; to the contrary, we lose our self-esteem because of sin.

Since we are made in the image of God, we have inherent worth. But, sin has clouded that wonderful fact. And so, we believe the lie that we are worthless or inferior.

This is reinforced by the world system, which reminds us daily that if we are not young, beautiful, wealthy, athletic, clever, admired, and famous, then we lack what it takes to be worthy.

Think of a time, especially when you were young, when you were told by a parent, friend, or teacher that you were stupid, or clumsy, or ugly, or fat, or too thin, and you would probably never amount to very much. Was that encouraging for you to hear? Did that fire up your self-esteem several notches? Did it make you want to immediately find someone in need, so you could minister to him or her, and be a comforter?

Many of us have received enough insults and put-downs in our lives that we actually believe them. And, we tend to treat others accordingly.

Here is my question: “How is that judgmental spirit working for you in terms of maintaining close relationships?”

If you find yourself typically thinking negative thoughts about other people, could it be that the real person you dislike is yourself, not the other person? In Jeremiah 31:3, God says:

I have loved you with an everlasting love.

In Romans 8:38-39, Paul reminds us:

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How long is everlasting? What does inseparable mean? Is the point becoming clear to you?

2. (The second possible reason why we hasten to judge others is) Inflated Ego

It’s far too easy to forget about our own fallen-ness. In some ways, this may sound like a contradiction of the first point, but it is not. We are made in God’s image. We are loved by Him. We have worth. At the same time, we **are** sinners—possibly even as much or more of a sinner as the people who we tend to judge. However, our sins do not seem to be so gross because they are ours. On a scale of one to ten, we are not such bad people.

Other people, however, have faults that we would never even think of having, so they are much worse, and therefore, deserving of our judgment. Such thinking defies logic. However; if we are honest, we have all reasoned that way from time to time.

So, what can we do about this attitude? The more we recognize how sinful we are and the closer we stay to the cross of Christ, the more we realize that we have absolutely no right to judge anyone else. The more we recognize our own sinfulness and inadequacies, the less inclined we are to point out the faults of others. The more aware we are of the enormous and awesome grace which God bestows on me daily, the more we want to extend love and grace to others, rather than evaluating them according to my imperfect standards.

3. (The third possible reason why we hasten to judge others is) Selfishness

There is an inherent trait in human nature called “selfishness.” One of the first words a child learns is the word, “mine.” When you try to take away something the child believes is his or hers, that child learns a second word—“no!” Then, the child learns to scream, hit, and if all else fails, throw a temper tantrum in a crowded supermarket or restaurant. If you have children, you know what I mean. If you do not have children yet, get ready. It has been said that God’s severest punishment for his disobedient children is to let them have children of their own.

This selfishness trait extends to the way we view how others believe and act. Since I unconsciously view my way of thinking and doing as the “right” way, I will be quick to judge those who think and act differently.

The Apostle Paul warned us against such judgment in the passage I shared with you earlier from Romans 14. That passage is often referred to as the “weaker brother” scenario. Paul implies that there are many ways of behaving, and that they are not necessarily right or wrong, good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable.

This has long been a bone of contention within the Christian church. Certain activities that are common-place among some Christians are avoided like the plague by other Christians. There are some Christians who never have to wrestle with the hypothetical question, “How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?” because they don’t think angels should be dancing in the first place.

In this passage, Paul states up-front that we are to accept those who are weak in faith—the word “weak” could be translated “unsure” or “tentative”—but the use of the word “weak” is not intended for the purpose of passing judgment. Paul goes on to ask in verse 4:

Who are you to judge the servant of another?

We are all servants of the Lord, and we answer to Him alone, not to our critics.

There are several passages in the Bible that refer to Holy Spirit-given, or spiritual, gifts. Certain passages list some of those gifts: evangelism, pastor/teacher, discernment, helps, etc. Try as I might, however, nowhere can I find the spiritual gift of “judgment.” Yet, we all know people who are convinced they have been uniquely endowed with it, and they have made an art form of practicing it with far more regularity than any other spiritual gift. If you ever find yourself exercising that so-called “gift of judgment,” ask the Lord to remove it, and replace it with understanding, compassion, love, and an extra dose of humility.

Why do we judge others? I’ve shared three common reasons. Do any of them apply in your situation?

1. Low Self-Esteem?
2. An Inflated Ego?
3. Selfishness?

When you observe other people, do you typically note their “positive” characteristics first, or their “negative” characteristics? Which do you remember more? What does that tell you about your tendency to be judgmental? And, does it need to change?

“Okay, preacher! I get your point! But, how do we go about changing?”

I’m glad you asked. Think about your own level of self-esteem. Do you tend to regard yourself as someone made in the image of God, or something less than that? If this is a concern, think about what Jesus Christ did on the cross for you. If He loved you enough to sacrifice His life for you, what should you think about your worthiness?

The next time you catch yourself judging someone else for an opinion, attitude, or action, think about your own spiritual condition before God. As you stand at the foot of the cross and look up at your Savior dying because of your sins, ask yourself if you really want to place that judgment against another person.

I find it interesting that in Scripture, God singles out our areas of greatest weakness, and He speaks to us about them in language we are sure to understand. In other words, God says, “How would you like it if that happened to you?”

For example, Jesus states in Matthew 10:32-33:

³² *“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.*

Also, in Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus reminds us:

¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

In light of that concept, review the verses mentioned earlier in this sermon. Notice that they all deliver the same message: if you judge others, you will be judged. Please don't take that lightly. There is a reason it is mentioned as many times, and in as many places, as it is. How many of us are thrilled at the proposition of God judging us for our errors, attitudes, and willful sins?

In the next day or two, re-read the verses which explain God's warnings against being judgmental. Ask yourself the question: “How would you like it if that happened to you?” For every judgment you can place against another person, think about one you do not want God to place against you.

If you think this might be an area where you need growth, write down the names of two or three trusted friends, and sometime during the week ahead, ask them to hold you accountable. Request that they lovingly and graciously help you to overcome this tendency to be judgmental.

Most of us who tend to be critical and judgmental of others have no idea what their lives are like, or what they happen to be going through. We cannot put ourselves in their place. But, we expect them to be just like us. Until we have walked in their actual circumstances, we have no cause to judge them. We have to constantly remind ourselves that God alone is the only true judge.

How does this affect relationships? I would suggest that people who are overly judgmental of others are relationally-challenged. They have a difficult time forming close relationships because there is always some imperfection in the other person that they consider worthy of judgment. This causes them to have few close friends. Therefore, they often feel rejected and ignored. Typically, they do not like those feelings, and so they compensate for the loss of self-esteem by becoming even more critical and judgmental. And, the cycle goes on and on.

We all need to recognize that although our faults may be different from those of other people, they are still faults. As others annoy us with their beliefs and actions, we must also annoy others with our beliefs and actions.

When it comes to judging others, it comes down to this: *“God wants His children to recognize that He alone has the role of judge.”*

Amen.