



March 2, 2025 *Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin?*

Scripture: Matthew 7:1-5

[Jesus said to them,] “Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged. You’ll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you. Why do you see the splinter that’s in your brother’s or sister’s eye, but don’t notice the log in your own eye? How can you say to your brother or sister, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ when there’s a log in your eye? You deceive yourself! First take the log out of your eye, and then you’ll see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s or sister’s eye.”

The half-truth: Jesus certainly loved sinners

March 3, 2025 Matthew 9:9-13

Tax collectors like Matthew collaborated with the Roman occupiers, collecting taxes (usually excessive) from their fellow Israelites. Jesus clearly, even shockingly welcomed and loved people like that, whom the “righteous” people of his day called “sinners.” (For another example of his behavior, cf. Luke 7:36-50.) There’s really no doubt that if we follow Jesus, he calls us to love sinners.

- Matthew was an outcast from respectable society. So imagine the type of friends who came to his house to eat with Jesus! (*The Message* paraphrased “tax collectors and sinners” with colorful precision as “crooks and riffraff.”) Who might be seen as “tax collectors and sinners” in 2015? How do you believe Jesus would treat (and have us treat) such people?
- When Jesus said, “I didn’t come to call righteous people,” who was he talking about? Was he saying that he actually considered them “righteous,” or was he saying ironically that THEY thought they were “righteous”? Is anyone, including you, so righteous that we do not need Jesus’ loving, merciful acceptance?

Prayer: Loving Lord, help me to see others through your eyes, eyes that lit with love and compassion at the sight of a “sinner.” Help me to love and serve anyone I can in your name. Amen.

God does not call us to judge what is and isn’t sin

March 4, 2025 1 Corinthians 4:3-5, Romans 14:4-13

One problem with believing that I should “hate” someone else’s sin is that it requires me to believe I’m qualified to judge that what that person is doing IS a sin. But the apostle Paul said only God (not us) can accurately assess people’s motivations, and see what is in their hearts. He strongly admonished the Christians in Rome: “Stop judging each other.”

- In verse 13, Paul said part of Christian community is to “never put a stumbling block or obstacle in the way of your brother or sister.” Scholar Leslie Allen summed up Paul’s point:

“Christian fellowship does not imply a right to run other people’s lives for them: only Christ can—and will—discharge such a right.” What’s the difference between healthy accountability, helping a fellow Christian avoid self-destructive behavior, and trying to run that person’s life for them?

- Have you ever been upset, even angered, by another person’s “sin,” only to have things that are hidden in the dark brought to light, motivations revealed, in a way that totally changed your view of the situation? How can trusting God to judge far more accurately than we ever could change the way we relate to one another?

Prayer: Compassionate God, help me to major in majors and minor in minors. Free me from the urge to judge your servants, and help me to live in an increasing measure of your peace and love. Amen.

“Hating the sins” of others can blind us to our own

March 5, 2025 Matthew 7:1-5

Elton Trueblood’s book *The Humor of Christ* noted that Jesus, far from always being somber and serious, often used humorous images to make a point vivid. In today’s reading, Jesus painted the absurd picture of someone with a log in their eye criticizing and trying to remove a splinter in another person’s eye. The image was laughable, but Jesus’ point was serious. He knew it’s easier to rebuke even others’ small failures than to see and correct our own flaws.

- What kinds of psychological “payoffs” often make it feel better to criticize others than to admit and face up to our own challenges? In what ways can recognizing the payoffs from that tendency serve as the first step in changing our behavior? What spiritual practices have you found that strengthen you to resist the inner urge to judge others?
- Have you ever had someone judgmentally attempt to remove a “speck” from your “eye?” Did that experience draw you closer either to the other person or to God? How did that experience differ from a time when someone graciously and compassionately offered insights you felt free to accept or reject?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, set me free from the addictive feeling of superiority when I find a “sin” to hate in someone else. Give me a clearer vision of myself, and of the love and grace with which you flood my life. Amen.

“Never consider unclean what God has made pure”

March 6, 2025 Acts 11:2-18

Some of the early Christians in Jerusalem thought it was okay to “love” Roman “sinners,” as long as you made it clear that you hated their sins by refusing to socialize or eat with them. God had to direct forcefully to get Peter and Cornelius together. Cornelius saw an angel; Peter had a vivid vision three times; the Spirit spelled out, “Go with these men.” Peter summed it up eloquently: “Who am I? Could I stand in God’s way?”

- Peter’s critics in Jerusalem could quote Bible texts that said Israelites should avoid contact with Gentiles (e.g. Deuteronomy 23:3, Nehemiah 13:1-3). So Peter was quite sure he knew what was clean and unclean, and a bit proud that he had strictly avoided the unclean (verse 8). Then he learned that God’s definitions were different from his. Has God ever led

you to rethink any of your “clean-unclean” definitions? Are there any God is nudging you about right now?

- Prejudice was not one-sided. Jews saw Romans as impure pagan occupiers; Romans saw Jews as ignorant conquered people with odd practices. Why do you think God cared so much about guiding Peter and Cornelius beyond those negative views of each other? We all see the world somewhat as “us” and “them.” Are you okay with leaving “them” alone, or has God’s desire to reach beyond barriers begun to shape your feelings, too?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you said, “Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children.” Nurture your peace-making spirit in my heart—yes, even toward the “thems” in my life. Amen.

Jesus love changed Zacchaeus’ life

March 7, 2025 Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus, another despised tax collector, climbed up in a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. When Jesus stopped under the tree and called his name, no doubt many thought, “Now Zacchaeus is going to catch it.” They grumbled when, instead, Jesus invited himself to eat at Zacchaeus’ house, thinking he was approving Zacchaeus’ bad actions (cf. v. 7). But Jesus’ love, rather than harsh condemnation, redirected Zacchaeus’ life.

- Zacchaeus, “a ruler among tax collectors, was rich.” That didn’t come from honest, hard work. Tax collectors paid Rome a secret, fixed amount—everything else they collected was theirs. They got rich by cheating people. What does it tell you about Jesus that he would risk his reputation to reach out to an unlovely, unloved man like Zacchaeus?
- Somehow, in Zacchaeus, the self-serving tax collector, Jesus saw the promise of generous, God-centered living. To the townspeople’s amazement, he turned out to be right. Zacchaeus said, “I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much.” Do you know anyone who radically reoriented their life after meeting Jesus? What good qualities has Jesus drawn out or magnified in you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for coming “to seek and save the lost,” including me. Help me to join you in doing that. Amen.

Saved for love, not for ill will

March 8, 2025 1 Peter 1:18 – 2:3

In the book *Unchristian*, researcher David Kinnaman reported that a stunning 87% of young non-religious people in America believe Christians are judgmental. Kinnaman quoted a 25-year-old named Jeff who said, “Christians talk about hating sin and loving sinners, but the way they go about things, they might as well call it what it is. They hate the sin AND the sinner.” Yet Peter wrote that accepting Jesus’ love moves us to get rid of qualities like ill will, envy and slander. Love and hate, he believed, do not coexist comfortably in a heart shaped by God’s goodness.

- Peter referred in 1:23 to Christians having received new birth. Too often, as Kinnaman found, the phrase “born again” leads many to think of a person with a condescending, unloving or exclusive attitude. What qualities did Peter say characterized a person who had been born again by God’s power? How has God made your life better by replacing

negative qualities like “ill will, deceit, pretense, envy, and slander” with the nourishing inner reality that “the Lord is good”?

Prayer: Dear God, help me live authentically in your love and grace, letting go of my need to look superior to others. Teach me to own my struggles, claim your power to transform me and trust that power to transform others. Amen.

Family Activity: Create a “Love one another” collage. Gather a piece of poster board, magazines, scissors, glue and markers. Invite one family member to write the title “Love One Another” on the poster board. Ask each person to cut out pictures of various people and fasten them to the poster. Some family members might even want to draw pictures of people. When your family has completed the poster, take a moment to wonder aloud what the lives of these different people are like. Say, “Often in everyday life we make assumptions or judgments about people we know and people we don’t know. God calls us to love all people. How can we each do a better job of loving others?” Pray and ask God to help you do this.