

They Like Jesus but not the church, session 2: The church is Judgmental and negative

- If you're just joining us in this series, let me recap a little bit of what we're talking about and why:
- Last week we talked about two disappointing facts: First is that Christians seem to be in a retreat mentality, pulling themselves out of the mainstream society in the pursuit of purity. And while purity is a good thing, isolation is not and the effect it's having is giving non-Christians a very bad view of us.
- These things can be largely summarized in these points: the church is judgmental, negative, and politically motivated;
- the church is homophobic;
- the church is male dominated and oppresses women;
- Christians arrogantly think they're right and all other religions are wrong;
- Christians are fundamentalists who take the whole Bible literally.
- Over the next few weeks we will be looking at these misperceptions about Christianity and the church. If you want to hear what I had to say last week, I invite you to go online and listen to the audio of it.
- So, today we'll be talking about the first of these things: the perception that we're judgmental and negative.

- I have to say, this one might not be too far off the mark. While many Christians are positive and loving, we can also be downright rude in the way we discuss and interact with those who have a different view on life. This is the quote I introduced this point with last week:

"I did grow up in a church, but now I am a Buddhist. When I became a mother, I wanted my daughter to have a spiritual upbringing. However, I didn't want her to become like the Christians in the church I knew. They were always so negative and complaining about everything, and I wanted my daughter to be in a positive environment. I became a Buddhist since they are so much more loving and peaceful people than those in the church." -Jennie, owner of a beauty salon

- Ouch. Or this sentiment, echoed by waiters and waitresses across the country:
- *"I hate working Sundays, because that's when all the Christians come in. They fuss more than most people and complain about the smallest things. And they never tip well."*
- Now I worked in waiting tables for years so this hits home for me...and it has some truth to it. I usually had my worst tipping days per table on Sunday afternoons.
- But the real problem is that we should really be known for the opposites of those things.
- These are some serious and sad perceptions. But this isn't anything new.

Some false perceptions of the early church:

- Christians were thought to be guilty of incest (they were married but called each other brother and sister).
- Christians were thought be cannibals (drank the blood and ate the body of someone—Communion).

- Christians were thought to be atheists (didn't have a statue of their deity when most other religions at that time did).
- How did they solve these problems? They got out there and told people the truth. Our solution to these misperceptions will be much the same.
- But before we get in to that side, let's get in to what we SHOULD be known for:
- The Scriptures have a lot to say about how the Spirit of God transforms us.
- Matthew 5: 43–48; Matthew 5:44-48-- *“But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as **true children** of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to **both the evil and the good**, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, **how are you different from anyone else?** Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.*
- I'd like to note how closely Jesus associates perfection with unconditional love for both Christians and non-Christians. He doesn't associate it with staying from them, but engaging them and loving them.
- Colossians 4:5–6; *“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*
- 2 Corinthians 2:14-16—*“But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God **the pleasing aroma of Christ** among those who are being saved *and those who are perishing.**

- How do you smell? Good? Pleasing?
- These are descriptions of what a follower of Jesus **should look like** and be known as.
- But ask someone today what Christians are **generally known for**, and the answers might be quite different.
- They don't see us, because we're in our bubble. By and large, here's what this culture sees when it sees Christians:
- They see signs that even we find offensive.
- And their reaction, while presented humorously, shows a deep distrust, mockery and almost a fear of people God would have been the healers and hope-bringers to the world. But they only see those who go outside the bubble—and they're not always the best representation of God's people.
- So then what should we do? Well let's look at some of the things that Christians at large do that bring these perceptions about...and maybe we do on a smaller, quieter—but no less offensive—scale.

1. Should Christians Point Out the Sin of Others and Make Judgments?

- *Matthew 7:1-2* "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."
- This statement of Jesus occurs in his Sermon on the Mount in which he takes to task the hypocritical religious leaders of his day.

- These men judged others with a critical heart and condescending spirit, based on their own **opinions and wrong motivations**.
- Jesus tells his hearers—and us—that judging someone like this without caring for the person is wrong. Judging someone by human standards and opinions instead of by the Scriptures is wrong.
- Only God truly knows what's in someone's heart. Jesus says that our hearts should be broken **and filled with humility** whenever making any judgment on another, **because we are all guilty of something**.
- And no, repenting and being aware of your past mistakes does NOT give you a license to judge others for theirs.
- However, Scripture notes many examples of calling out sin in other Christians. In 1 Corinthians 5:4–5, for example, we see the apostle Paul taking a public stand on the issue of immorality within the Corinthian church.
- In Galatians 2:11, we see him correcting Peter personally about a certain teaching. And he instructs Timothy to take a stand against false teaching in the church in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3–7).
- But we have biblical guidelines for this type of “judging.” Jesus himself instructed believers about correcting other believers when they are in intentional sin.
- (Matthew 18:15–17) "If a brother or sister sins, go and point out the fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter

may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

- I want to point out that treating them like a pagan or tax collector does NOT mean excluding them, casting them out of the church and more or less ignoring them until they see the light.
- I've heard this preached: that if they won't listen, kick them out of the church. But what did Jesus do with pagans and tax collectors?
- He ate with them, loved them and got involved in their lives, hoping to redeem them back to God. Shame on us if we do anything less than that—especially to those who once loved God and have become trapped in sin.
- And let me be clear about something: This is not about how long their hair is, or if they have tattoos or earrings or vote for the 'wrong side' or anything else that you feel personally convicted about. This is about SIN.
- Far too many of us pretend our own personal preferences are sins. If we do not have clear, Biblical support for your opinion on something being wrong, then we need to be humble and have the hearts of servants.
- **And trust that if we are right, God will show them. But also pray that if we are wrong, God will show US. And hopefully, we can agree on it at the end of the day. That's true humility.**
- Only praying for “them” to be shown the truth is pretty arrogant.

- Galatians 6:1–4 offers additional guidance on confronting sin, **with the goal of restoring the person.** Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. **If any of you think you are something when you are nothing, you deceive yourselves.** “
- Bottom line, Jesus taught that we should not rush to judge others without knowing their hearts, nor should we judge with an arrogant or condemning spirit.
- Jesus did not say to ignore sin (“any thing goes”), but he gave instruction on how to lovingly confront it. How we do it makes all the difference.

2. Should Christians Point Out the Sins in Other People Outside the Church?

- The apostle Paul taught the Corinthian church that there is a difference between judging Christians and judging those outside the church.
- Read 1 Corinthians 5:12–13. **“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.”**
- Very clearly here the Scriptures say we have **no right to judge** those outside the church.
- Too often Christians spend time judging these people and their actions, when the Scriptures teach that right belongs to God alone.

- We often unrealistically expect non-Christians to act and be like Christians, then judge them if they don't live up to our personal expectations.
- It's only to be expected that non-Christians, without the instruction of Scripture or the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have some unique values and act differently than we do.
- I find it amazing how we can excuse Abraham for sleeping with his maidservant, Hagar and Solomon for having a billion concubines and the Old Testament practice of women being secondary citizens because they were cultural practices, but we can't excuse tattoos, piercings and a host of other things on the same grounds.
- *"I actually would want to be told if I was doing something that God wouldn't like me to do. I want to become a better person and more like Jesus. But that isn't how it feels coming from Christians and the Church. It feels like they're trying to shame and control you into their way of thinking and personal opinions about right and wrong instead of becoming a better person and living like Jesus did."* –Maya
- This quote strikes to what I think the core of the problem is:

3. We have become known more for what we are against than what we are for

- Kimball relates a story where he was in an airport and saw a young man wearing this T-shirt:
- So he asked him about his church. The young man asked, "Are you a Christian?"
- "Yes, I am"..."praise God!" the man said.

- Kimball responded, “I don’t know if I’d be wearing that T-shirt, though; I think it repels people from Jesus rather than draw him to them.”
- He said, “Well we can’t hide the truth, and if one person repents of sin from this shirt, it was worth it.”
- So Kimball asked him, “Have you ever known even one person to repent because of this shirt?” “No, but that’s the Holy Spirit’s job. My job is just to deliver the message.”
- What message does this shirt deliver to Muslims? Homosexuals? People who have had an abortion?
- Remember that quote from Maya? She wants to know what she’s doing wrong. She wants to be more like Jesus. She wants to be a better person. And she’s not alone.
- Young people all over are searching for ways to improve themselves and be better people. They want to improve.
- The reason so many turn from Christianity and to other religions is we often offer advice like, “Stop drinking, smoking, having sex out of marriage, cut your hair, get rid of those piercings, wear cleaner clothing, wear a tie, don’t listen to “that” music, Stop doing that, stop doing this, **stop; don’t; stop; quit.**”
- But we have a positive message, right?
- Some of this comes because politicians have used Christians and their hot buttons to sway votes.

- So it is understandable why people can assume we are all about what we're against. Maybe we are. Maybe we've fallen into that Pharisee trap where we ignore what we should DO and focus on what we shouldn't do.
- I feel we do a great job of this here, and more often than not the preaching done up here is all about living better lives as Christians and not avoiding the bad stuff—though that is important and is definitely part of it.
- I am a firm believer that God is not about us avoiding bad, but he is about us seeking good. He doesn't want us to follow all these don'ts, but he has a definite list of do's. In case you're not getting it, let me offer some negative ways we present ourselves and their positive counterparts.
- “Don't lie” becomes “Live honestly and truthfully.”
- “Homosexuality is sin,” becomes “God wants us to have physical and emotional health.” Which would include abstaining from some things—like homosexuality, infidelity and pornography--and practicing other things—like healthy diet, exercise and actively loving our spouse.
- Do you see the difference? Not only does it sound better, but—more importantly—it stresses doing things a better way, as opposed to avoiding things and doing the bare minimum.
- Jesus told us to love others, he didn't just say “don't hate.” Because doing love requires more than not doing hate. I can be apathetic and not hate. I can't do that and be considered loving.

- So stop being against so many things...start being for things. Don't fight evil as much as you do good.
- I promise that by doing good, you'll be fighting against evil, but you'll be replacing it with something.
- And then we can avoid being called, a church that is judgmental and negative
- And be seen as a community loving and serving others as Jesus would
- close