

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." ³⁹ He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Have you ever been told, "Judge not, lest ye be judged."? This might be one of the most misquoted Scriptures in our broader society today. Quoting this seems to get one off scot-free, and seems to justify just about any aberrant behavior one can imagine. Do you think that's right, that no matter what someone is involved in, you should just leave them alone? And, when we do try to speak the truth to them, that without repentance, their behavior is abhorrent to God, deserving of eternal condemnation? We live in a culture where we are labeled as bigots, judgmental and horrible people, only interested in condemning others; instead, we are concerned for their eternal salvation. Especially when it comes to sins against the sixth commandment, which God has told us Himself is one of the most

important because it involves sins against our own bodies, the temple of the Holy Spirit that He has created in His image, we are to not sit back and allow folks to continue on without speaking out against the wrongdoing we know is a big deal.

Just what does the word “judge” mean? Judging CAN mean that we are being self-righteous, thanking God that we aren’t nearly as off the tracks as the obviously sinful and wayward brother. This is indeed what Jesus is saying SHOULDN’T be our attitude. Rather, we are to be humble, remember that but for the grace of God go I, and seek to help our brother that is in mortal danger, rather than just pointing out his sin in order to make ourselves feel better about ourselves and our own lives. We aren’t to keep a record of how much or how well we’ve kept God’s Law; rather, we give thanks to Him that He has redeemed us by His blood and righteousness on the cross of Calvary. Except for Him, we’d be in the same pit as the man that is living in obvious, abject sin. This judgment can come from a place where we think that there is some semblance of a plan to get into heaven because we’ve kept some of God’s Laws – He wants to make it apparent that there is absolutely no hope for us in this way. Think of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount – that’s why Jesus makes it seem so impossible to keep His Law – SO THAT WE WON’T RELY ON IT. It’s not just about keeping the Ten Commandments, but it’s about keeping even the spirit of them

For example: We don’t just have to not kill our brother, we also have to avoid wishing him harm – otherwise, we’ve already committed murder against him in our heart. Also for example: We don’t just have to refrain from committing physical, sexual immorality with our brother’s wife, we also have to avoid sinful, carnal thoughts about his wife, or lusting after her in our heart, or having lustful thoughts – otherwise, it’s just as if we’ve already gone through with the sinful action.

In our text, Jesus reminds us that we are not to have judgmental thoughts, or take any delight in our brother falling into sin. We aren’t to try to make hay off of the fact that we think that we’re somehow better than our neighbor because our sins are more hidden than his; that’s the judging that

Jesus is talking about. In the same way, Jesus expands upon the definition of terms here – He wants to have a clear definition of judgment, condemnation and forgiveness. He’s smoking out any tendency on our part to try to self-justify ourselves, or think that there’s some way for us to get to heaven based upon our adherence to the law. Let me be clear – there is NO WAY for us to keep the Law of God perfectly; if we think that there is, then we are mistaken!

Judging also CAN mean that we are judging our brother’s actions AND OUR OWN against God’s righteous standard, trying to keep the Law of God because it pleases Him, and not because we’re trying to earn enough tallies in heaven to get in on our own. Good judging is being familiar enough with the Word of God to talk to our brother, remind him of his sin, just like the prophet Nathan did with King David – that there are consequences for grossly sinful behavior, and that God will deal with them if they are not repented of with a true heart. Good judging is keeping ourselves from the same sin as our brother, rather than being drawn down into the fires of hell with him.

A healthy attitude for us to take when we find our brother sinning greatly is to first examine ourselves, confess our many sins, and receive God’s absolution for them. Are you having trouble identifying sins in your own life? We need to remember the meaning of mercy. Instead of having a selfish mercy, which we are wont to have, we need to embrace and aim for a Godly mercy. Mercy toward our brother; mercy toward our neighbor in need; mercy toward those who are needing clothing, or food, or shelter. Mercy that flows from God to us, that doesn’t have anything to do with whether or not we deserve it. Mercy that is freely given by God, that covers over all of your sins.

Joseph showed mercy to his brothers, by not giving them what they really deserved. They were dastardly, evil men. They sold Joseph into slavery, after first deciding to throw him into a well. They were deceitful when they told their father that Joseph, Jacob’s favorite son from his favorite wife, was dead. They deserved nothing except being punished by Joseph, disowned by him, maybe even killed by him. He would have been justified in destroying them.

However, Joseph was given the strength, and the power, and the motivation by the Holy Spirit to have mercy on his brothers. He forgave them for all that they had done against him, and didn't give them the punishment that they deserved. He even bestowed grace upon them, and took care of them, during the deadly famine. Even after Jacob died, and the brothers thought that they were going to see the wrath of the "number two" in Egypt visited upon them, he was empowered by God to show further mercy on them. Thanks be to God for giving us such a good example of mercy on which to draw.

But, this version of mercy isn't what Jesus means in v. 36 of our text from Luke's Gospel, chapter 6, when He talks about being merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Joseph was a wonderful example to us, and we should read more of them throughout the Bible. Such as the example of David showing mercy to Saul – even though he knew that he would be anointed king over Israel, and that God had withdrawn His favor from Saul because of his wickedness, David didn't do what Saul deserved. He didn't kill or maim him; rather, he played his harp to soothe him and calm Saul's anguished thoughts. Even when David's friends encouraged him to kill Saul, and get him out of the way, David wouldn't do it. He respected the fact that God had made Saul king, and David didn't want to do anything against him.

What does Jesus mean in our passage when He talks about mercy, if it isn't simply not delivering vengeance and retribution? The definition of mercy when it comes to God Himself is perfect, just as He is. Mercy in this case takes the format of going beyond just refraining from visiting justice on His people, which He would be justified in giving us – eternal destruction. He blesses you with His face, His presence, His glorious prize of heaven. God the Father showed mercy to us when He sent His only Son, Jesus, to earth, to suffer, die and rise again. Christ was the only way that we could have our sins removed from us, as far as the East is from the West. The only way for us avoid the fires of hell was to be soaked in the waters of Holy Baptism. The only way to have eternal life within you was for you to partake of the fruits of Jesus' sacrifice, when you receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament

of the Altar. Thanks be to God that He gives you the Word, which includes the absolution of your confessed sins and sinful natures, which also underpins the Sacraments.

It's only when we are seeing clearly, when we realize that we are sinners ourselves, through and through, that we have the correct vision to see to take the speck out of our brother's eye. We can see that it's not about judging, but being merciful. Jesus mentions mercy, and the ideal example of mercy, that of the Father, before He ever mentions judging and justice at all. Seeing correctly in this case involves having the proper perspective on judging, with the interest in bringing the brother back to full fellowship, rather than making ourselves look better at his expense. That's mercy, folks...not looking to make ourselves appear better, but true, Godly mercy. The Holy Spirit works this in our hearts more and more each day, until we reach the perfection of heavenly glory. That's why we live lives in view of our baptism; lives of daily repentance and forgiveness; thankfulness for the fact that you are renewed, you are strengthened, you are enabled to continue on because your sins are forgiven by God forever.

The greatest need in the church, indeed, among sinful mankind, is being made righteous in the sight of God, and having your sins forgiven and forgotten by Him forever. Everything else pales in comparison, because this greatest need is what is necessary for you to be ushered into heavenly glory when you die. We can have all of the esteem of our fellow men, you can think that we've lived the most spotless, peerless life, we can think that we've achieved holiness before God on our own, but these boasts fall short in a blink of an eye.

We aren't trying to earn anything for ourselves, or improve our standing, by pointing out sin. Rather, we're sincerely concerned for the spiritual health of our brother in the faith. Showing love to him might seem to take the form of letting him do what he wants, and giving him complete autonomy. However, if we know that what he is doing is going to get him into deep trouble, and maybe even dull his theological radar to the point of extinguishing his faith, we have a duty to speak. We do this speaking of the truth IN LOVE, that is, tactfully, using the building blocks of a relationship that we've

already built with him over days and years. But sometimes speak we must, always being mindful of our own sinful natures, and the fact that we're no better than he is just because we're able to hide our sins more skillfully.

Thanks be to God that He continues to lead and guide us through this Scripture. He gives us the tools to dig deeper into His original meaning, which is much deeper than just be superficially nice to each other. How is it being nice to someone to allow them to continue in unrepentant sin? The only result of this will be worse than negative – it's death forever! The Holy Spirit promises to lead and guide us, to give us the words to say and the opportunities to say them, so that we will not be self-righteous, but righteous guides for our brother in need.

Jesus has truly done everything for your salvation. He has forgiven you for your many sins, for your attempts to reach out to your brother that weren't effective or using the right words, for your thinking that you're somehow better than your brother. He promises to guide you and lead you, to do His will. Even when it seems impossible to remain faithful in a world that is completely astray, the Holy Spirit will keep you steadfast, slow to anger, and patient. He keeps you willing to teach, without succumbing to the temptation to compare yourself with your brother. He will lead you to the truth that Jesus has overcome the world. Thanks be to God that He has! He's the only hope that we have, and that hope is realized in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Christ will come again to take you from this vale of tears, and temptation to sin, to Himself in heaven. You can be sure of it – God's Word is never broken. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.