

Luke 6:37 Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.

I do not fully understand what Jesus meant in this verse, which was delivered during the Sermon on the Plain. However, although I don't pretend to have a grasp on the biblical context of the time, the wisdom in Jesus' words during this sermon is just as applicable to me during these modern times as they were to that crowd in attendance over 2,000 years ago.

Judgement and its stricter cousin, condemnation is sometimes understandable and appropriate, such as in repeated instances of abuse, neglect, dishonesty, theft, etc. In these sad cases, the best course of action is to remove the offending person from our lives if possible and try to forgive as best we can.

But what of those individuals whose behavior is difficult, yet not enough so to warrant disengaging ourselves from them completely? We might nurse resentment toward that difficult parent or neglectful friend or lazy coworker because they keep hurting us, emotionally, mentally, or financially. We might fume over their ongoing onslaughts and rehash their past behavior, refusing to forgive. We might feel loftily self-righteous as we tell ourselves that we'd never treat others that way.

But life in all its irony has a way of dealing with our moral superiority. Someday, and maybe even years later, we might find that we are in the same position as the people we once criticized, feeling the same feelings, acting out in the same ways. We might find that we ourselves are the perpetrators of hurt. We might also discover that we ourselves are then the rightful objects of judgement and condemnation.

If it sounds like I am speaking from experience, I am. I have judged others, only to have that proverbial shoe glued onto the wrong foot, and these eye-opening events were humbling reminders that I should not have been so critical without understanding the background. Adding to this revelation were confessions by these so-called difficult loved ones about the insecurities, confusion, and unhappiness, all of which was silently endured for years. Listening to their experiences while looking at my own less than perfect reflection, I came to understand that most difficult people, myself included, are not mean people, but rather, unhappy ones, and as such, deserve understanding, empathy, and most of all, forgiveness.

Life teaches us that we should not feel morally superior to anyone. Life presents us with challenges to be faced and overcome, and our experiences pave the way for understanding and the wonderful gift of forgiveness, both given and received. Life itself is the judge, condemner, and absolver. God's wondrous gift of life, with all its pain and suffering and joy and love is the ultimate teacher, and we are its students.

And to me, that's what Jesus meant.

Dear Lord, thank you for life, with all its difficulty and joy.

Amen

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