

**“Resting Our Gavels of Judgment,  
We Value Diversity”**

3/28/99

This past week I was reviewing some information and I came across a story that I have not seen or read in quite some time. It originally appeared in a book written by David Roper and it has since been picked up and been transferred through numerous other works and writings. I want to just take a moment and share the story with you because I believe that this story, better than anything else that I know, depicts the very matter I want to address with you in our remaining moments this morning. He simply says,

“Once a group of young men (and this is a true story by the way, not just a fictitious story) decided to play a practical joke on a young bachelor lawyer who worked with them in their corporate offices in Dallas. It was the custom each Thanksgiving in this particular company for the President of the firm to give free turkeys to all of the employees. The young friend had indicated his displeasure at that idea since being a bachelor he had no idea what he would do with a whole turkey. Furthermore, he had no desire whatsoever to cook it. So his friends decided that they would pull a little prank. They confiscated his turkey and they replaced it with one made out of papermaiche. The only thing that remained from the original bird was that they took the neck and the tail and put it in the right place so the wrapping would look just perfect, as though it were a turkey.

The day before the holidays they had a ceremony in which the turkeys were handed out. Each of the members of the this firm would step forward, lift their turkey off the table, say a few words, and then they would take the turkey home. On this particular day the young man completely unaware of the switch that had taken place stepped forward, picked up his bogus bird, headed out the door, and headed for the transport system to go home. When he arrived at the transportation station that was there he was seated on a bench next to a man who was sitting there with a dejected look on his face. Since the turkey was an obvious piece of conversation they began to talk about it sitting on this young man’s lap.

In the course of time the young man learned that the man seated next to him was going through a hard time. His income had been at an all-time low, his family was struggling, he was without a job, and probably this was going to be the most miserable Thanksgiving that he and his family had ever experienced. Suddenly the young man had an idea. He thought it might be a good idea to make his turkey available to this man who was sitting there going through such a hard time. But because of fear that he might embarrass him, as the conversation progressed, he learned that the man had bought some ground beef, some hamburger meat, and he had it in his pocket. As it turned out that ground beef was going to be the only think that he and his family were going to have on that Thanksgiving Day. So deciding rather than humiliating him by simply giving him the turkey, he decided that what he would do was to arrange a swap. He would get the man to give him his little piece of ground beef for his big turkey. With a great sense of gratitude the exchange was made. Of course you can begin to imagine the outcome. When the man

returned home with his family, children crowded around, wide-eyed with anticipating, and with sounds of their dad's voice saying, 'what a wonderful young man that he gave us this turkey.' Only to open the package and to discover that it was a bogus bird!"

As the story goes apparently this young lawyer and his friends spent numerous days trying to find again this man as some transport station and they never could again cross paths. That young man, that young lawyer, has had to live for the rest of his life with the idea there is a man somewhere who thinks that he was the most crooked, shark-skinned lawyer he had ever met in his life.

Well, lawyers are often involved in matters of judgement judging others. Yet it is amazing how true it is in the Christian world as well that we get caught up in this think called "judging" – judging others. Who could have known that day that what was in that wrapping. That is how could that young man have known that there had been this joke played on him. With sincere motive and with good intention he was trying to help a family but his best intention turned out to be their worst nightmare. Yet so many times in life the fact of life is that we are prone to think the worst of others and we always expect that they will give us the benefit of the doubt and think the best of us. That is just not really how life is because in life there are moments of crisis and moments of conflict. There are moments when things unwrap in a certain way circumstantially in life when people begin to assume the worst about us, when we end up being judged by others because we are misunderstood and we are maligned when they really don't know the story. I tell you, it makes us all feel very terrible when someone treats us in that way. Yet I find that it is a common experience in the Christian world. It is a common feast that goes on in the church. We are constantly looking, examining, and evaluating one another and judging one another. Jesus, in a very clear and straightforward fashion said it this way, "Judge not lest you be judged." For with the same judgement that you judge you will be judged. With the measure you use it will be measured to you.

Let's go to the next screen. Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or, how can you say to your brother let me remove the speck from your eye and look, a plank is in your own eye? Jesus simply said, why are you being so hard on one another? Why is it that you constantly have this need to be judging one another? Judge yourself! That is exactly what Paul said to us at the supper today. At the place of the table he said, let a man examine himself for if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. You see, we all have this tendency to want to look at others through a microscope and want them to look at us through a telescope. The fact of life is that we need to examine carefully our own lives, our own motives, and then we need to look at others in a different light.

A lot of the balance of the Christian life is learning what it is to judge oneself and not to be someone who is constantly trying to pass judgement on others. Now, very quickly, when I talk about judging others you immediately think well does that mean that we should never tell anyone that they are wrong? Does that mean that we should never point out sins or failures or the consequences of wrong doing in life? Does that mean that we should never confront someone who is living in rebellion and breaking the

commandments of God? When we do those things are we judging others? In that same passage in Matthew, Chapter 7, when Jesus said judge not, the very next verses he talked about distinguishing between true teachers and false teachers. He talked about having a spirit in which we would be able to look and evaluate how the fruit of someone's life would be and what that would tell us about their nature. When the Bible tells us that we are not to judge it does not mean we are not to have discernment. We must have discernment. We must be able to determine between good and evil, truth and error, good and bad. Here is the difference though. The measure of determination must always be the Word of God; it must not be my own measure and standard.

The issue is that the authority must always be the authority of God and not just some judgmental attitude that I have developed in my own life. I find that many believers today are struggling with really being able to live free of a judgmental spirit.

We have been studying together the Book of James. Our friend James always has a way of just going right to the right of the matter. With sharp precision James addresses this issue of us judging one another. He gives us a specific word of commandment and instruction that I want to take just a few moments and share with you about this morning and give you a tool of evaluation so that while you are judging yourself you will not be guilty of judging others.

James, Chapter 4, reading in verses 11 and 12. James says, do not speak evil of one another brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver who is able to save and destroy. Who are you to judge another? Who are you to judge another? You see, James is not talking about discernment here. James is not talking about distinguishing between truth and falsehood. What he is talking about is a wrong spirit that so often comes into our lives and destroys our relationships in the community of faith known as the Church of Jesus Christ. It is a judgmental spirit. Every one of us must guard against the judgmentalism of our age.

Let me suggest some things to you this morning that might help you and help me to determine when we are becoming judgmental. I believe that James gives us several things here.

1. I believe he tells us that I am judgmental when I develop an arrogant outlook. When I go around looking at others as though my standards are higher than theirs, when I compare myself to others, and I have become like a hot air balloon rising above in my own mind where other people are living. You see, the whole context of this command, this instruction, is that of humility. Throughout the course of James 4 James has been talking about our personal life, our inner life, our intimacy with God. He has been talking about how that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble and that if we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, he will lift us up. But you see, many people who are believers get just enough spiritual knowledge, just enough scriptural truth in their mind and notebook to get dangerous. What they end up doing is they become proud, they

become arrogant, they become personally exalted, and forget that we all stand on level ground, the ground of need of God's grace and mercy in our lives. Not one of us is better than another. Not one of us is more competent or capable than the other is. Each of us has been given different gifts. But every one of us has to come to the place in life where the defining issue of life is the grace of God and where grace comes pride cannot exist. That is why when you sing that song "Amazing Grace" you go on to say that saved a wretch like me, I was lost, I was blind. That is the condition of every man, every woman, boy or girl without Jesus Christ. We are lost and in need of grace. Therefore, once we have experienced that grace we all stand on the common ground, the common ground of need of a Savior and of a cross. Consequently, anything that would promote a spirit of arrogance is unbecoming of a follower of Jesus Christ.

There is an incredible passage of scripture found over in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Luke. Every time I read this passage, it is a parable that Jesus told, I really believe it was a story he told based on a true life experience that he had witnessed in church, something he had witnessed as the Son of God not just something others would have witnessed. It is the story of how a Pharisee and a tax collector went to church. They went to the synagogue. They went to worship. The Bible tells us, in this parable of Jesus that the Pharisee stood up and began to pray. He began to say, God, I thank you that I am not like everybody else in this building. Can you imagine? Can you imagine someone in a worship gathering like this, standing up and in the midst of praying, saying, God, thank you I am not like all these other people in here? In fact, he goes on to say in this very passage of scripture that he not only said thank you that I am not like others but then he went on to say, thank you specifically that I am not like that tax collector sitting right over there. You see, he measured himself above all others. There was a spirit of arrogance and a spirit of pride. Jesus talked about how that God saw that arrogance in his life. He went on to talk about the tax collector that was sitting in the corner. No one could have really seen him or been aware of him except for this Pharisee who was looking for some point of comparison and yet that tax collector was just crying out in his soul saying, be merciful to me, oh God. Be merciful to me. Jesus said, I tell you that one man went down to his house justified and the other did not for every one who exalts himself will be humbled but he who humbles himself will be exalted. You see, I have become a judgmental person when I begin to go to church and try to figure out who has the most spiritual badges and the most spiritual awards. There is no place for that in the church of God. Every one of us is a debtor to the grace of God and we have no place for a judgmental spirit.

Something that I have learned along the way is how needy I am every week when I come to this pulpit. I need these messages just like you need these messages. Please don't ever get the idea that because this platform I am standing on is elevated that I am elevated because I am not. Just like you I struggle with humility and pride. Just like you I struggle with the tongue and the words. Just like you I struggle with the battle between being judgmental and being gracious.

Whenever I preach, though I may be up here emoting and sharing and communicating and pointing at you, I want you to know that every time I point at you three of those guys point right back at me. I am keenly aware that the most challenging preparation week in and week out is not the material it is the messenger. My life must mark a man who is seeking God and who is depending upon his grace. I can't save anybody. I can't teach anybody. I can't change anybody. Only Jesus Christ can do that but I can be a messenger of what he has done in my life and the lives of thousands and millions of people through the ages of history. You see, I am judgmental when I have an arrogant outlook. When I develop an arrogant outlook I need to be careful. You may be a Christian who feels like you have moved up a few notches, if so, you better be careful.

2. Not only am I judgmental when I develop an arrogant outlook but I am judgmental when I display a critical spirit.

Do you want to know if you are falling prey to judgmentalism? Listen to yourself talk. Ask others to listen to your talk. Are you constantly criticizing and fault finding? Are you constantly finding a way to put others down in order that you might put yourself up? James made that pretty clear here when he said, do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He was talking about Christians. He was talking about the church. He was saying don't come together and constantly be griping and complaining and fault finding, because what you are demonstrating is that you are now having a judgmental spirit when you are constantly criticizing others.

Judgmentalism is often seen in our lives when we are quick to point out the faults of others. That is why, in the scripture, the Bible tells us in Colossians, Chapter 3, verse 21 speaking to parents (fathers in particular), do not exasperate your children that they may not lose heart. One of the worst things a parent can do to a child is constantly to criticize and fault find in their life and so set up a false standard of behavior that that child cannot be themselves and they cannot feel loved and affirmed. That has no place in a family and it has no place in a church. When a church is filled with people who have a negative, critical spirit, they simply are destroying the work of grace in the life of a church. People won't be saved. Lives won't be changed. Mercy will not be ministered because we will be polarized in our own judgmental spirit.

You can believe the right thing and yet you can behave the wrong way. Did you know that? A case study is the Pharisees. Nothing wrong with what they believed. They just behaved wrongly. They had a wrong spirit. They were judgmental. They were proud. They were arrogant. They were critical. So the Bible tells us we are not to pass judgment on others because we are constantly displaying a spirit of criticism.

3. I am judgmental when I disregard the positive standards of God's law. James goes on to talk about here where are we to place ourselves as judges of the law. If

we judge the law, we are not a doer of the law but a judge and he challenges this issue of us taking the position of judgment against others because the intent of the law is not that we might be able to simply judge others it is that we might fulfill the positive standard of the law.

What is the positive standard of the law? Well, somebody came to Jesus one day and they said, Jesus, what is the greatest of all of the commandments? Do you remember what he said? He said, all of the commandments can be put into this – Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. You mean that Jesus is saying that the whole motivational force of the Ten Commandments is love? Absolutely! It is the theme of the Ten Commandments. It is not in order that we might be able to set ourselves up as judges of one another but that through the love of God and love of others that we would seek that which would be good and best in the lives of each.

I love the way our friend, Tony Evans, describes the love teaching of the Ten Commandments. He said, “Jesus summarized all of God’s law by saying that we should love God with our whole being and our neighbors as ourselves. The Ten Commandments are really the commandments that have to do with love. Let me show you. The first commandment forbids another God. Our love cannot be fickle. It must be single-minded. The second commandment forbids idols. Love must be loyal. The third commandment forbids taking God’s name in vain. Love must be respectful. The fourth commandment says remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Love must be focused in its affections. The next six commandments address our relationships with others. The fifth commandment says that we are to honor father and mother meaning that love must be submissive to legitimate authority. The sixth commandment forbids murder. Love values other people. The seventh commandment rules out adultery. Marital love is to be pure, undefiled, and loyal. The eighth commandment says do not steal. Love is not to be selfish and take from others what rightfully belongs to them. The ninth commandment says we are not to bear false witness. Love must be truthful. The tenth commandment forbids coveting. Love must be content and thankful. Therefore, love must govern the way that we talk about others and the person who speaks against a brother or sister breaks God’s law.” You see, God wants us to display the positive standards of his love and of his word. We are not to be constantly living with this judgmental spirit.

4. There is a fourth warning I believe we have here in the Book of James. That is not only when we display an arrogant spirit and not only when we are constantly using criticism and then disregarding the positive standards of God’s law evidences of judgmentalism but I am judgmental when I discredit the motives of others. When I presume and assume that I know your motives and therefore I pass judgment on you because of that. The truth of the matter is I really can’t know someone else’s heart. You can’t know someone else’s heart.

That story that we talked about at the very beginning, I am sure that that poor man who opened that bogus bird that day must have really wondered about the motives of that young man. Yet that young man's motives were perfectly pure and right. He just didn't know, he was ignorant of the situation. Yet, so many times we are ignorant. Ignorant of what is happening in the lives of others. That doesn't mean we cannot face with them the fact that they may be hurting or that they may have had something injurious happen in their lives. Maybe we have to help them work through the injury and consequence of that. But we have to be careful about ever presuming to know the motives of another.

I have told you the story before but I believe it bears repeating. It is found in Steven Covey's book, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." It is about a man who boarded a subway in New York early one morning with four children. He got on that train and all the commuters were there and in the busyness of that commuting passage of the train the children got on and just began to go wild on this subway car. They were bouncing from seat to seat and bumping into the people who were there. The people were getting more irritated by the moment. The man was sitting there with a dazed stare on his face as if he didn't recognize anything that was going on. Finally someone in a seat near him looked up at him and said, sir, why don't you do something about these children? To which the man responded, oh, oh, I am sorry. I didn't even realize what they were doing. I have been up all night. Their mother just died. I don't even know what I am going to do or what is going to happen next. In that moment as he began to verbalize what had really happened in his life the night before, in the hours prior to getting on that subway car, suddenly people in the subway changed. Suddenly they quit seeing this as a man who is irresponsible with kids who were out of control. They began to see the hurt and the pain and the ugliness of what was happening with that family. The people began to melt down and love them and care for them. You see, in every one of our lives we need to be careful about passing the judgment upon others in their motives when in fact we, like they, need grace in our lives.

Our world, ladies and gentlemen, needs to see a church in this age that is filled with truth and love. We must never become sloppy in our handling of the truth of God's word and discerning how the truth cuts against the culture. We must never become so consumed with our own perceptions of truth that we fail to translate that into merciful love to meet the needs of a culture that is without Christ.

Our world knows nothing of the truth of God. Our world is in darkness and in ignorance. What this world needs today more than it has ever needed it before is a church that is alive not devouring one another with a spirit of judgmentalism and not constantly taking that judgmental anger to the world but a church that is full of love for Jesus Christ, a church with a desire to go out in this world and minister the mercy and the grace of God. Our God is a merciful God.

The Bible tells us over in the Book of Ephesians, (how I love this passage of scripture) in Chapter 2, that God is rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us and even when we were dead in trespasses he made us alive with Christ. He raised us up together and he made us to sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus that in the ages to

come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us in Jesus Christ.

We do not deserve the grace of God. We do not deserve the mercy of God. We deserve his judgment. But God is rich in mercy and God wants you and God wants me to judge ourselves and then to lay down our false standards of judgment toward other and to go out and be ministers of mercy in a world that so desperately needs it. Our world is cold and hard. Our world is violent. Our world is angry and extreme. What this world needs to see is a church that is full of mercy. I don't mean some soft paddy mercy. I am talking about a severe mercy. A mercy that expresses what Jesus did when he died on the cross, when he shed his blood, when he suffered on our behalf that he might offer to us the gift of eternal life.

Oh, today, how I hope that that mercy has touched your life. How I hope that today you will purpose to be a minister of that mercy in this world and in this day in which we live.

I want to ask that heads be bowed and eyes closed. No one moving or stirring. This is a very important moment spiritually in this service today.

I have to be very honest and tell every one of you in this room that it is very possible for you to come to church and to find a judgmental spirit. People all across America today are going to go yearning into churches just like this one. Someone there with a spirit of judgment will appoint themselves as God's committee to point out the error, the weakness, and the wrongness of their presence there. I want you to know that in church you can experience a judgment that is not of God. But I want you to know today that there is a Savior whose name is Jesus. He died on a cross to pay for your sins, to extend to you the mercy of God and to remove from you the judgment of God regardless of where you have been or what you have done or how you have lived. When that mercy touches your life it changes your life. You can't live the same old way anymore. You want to live a different life. You want to be a different person because mercy changes you! Today if you have never received Jesus Christ, I want to give you an opportunity and I want to extend an invitation on God's behalf. Not the churches behalf or my behalf but God's behalf that you would come and experience the love of Christ in your life today.

Maybe today as a Christian you have fallen prey to the bad habit of being judgmental. Maybe you just need to use this altar as a place you would come and kneel and place before the Lord this morning spiritually the false measures of judgment and that you would just ask God to make you a tender, gracious, and merciful Christian. Not soft but strong in mercy. Tough in love. To make a difference for Christ in this place today.

Maybe you have questions about how to become a part of this church fellowship. Maybe you would like to follow Christ in the waters of believer's baptism, you have trusted him, and you want to go public and say I belong to him. The invitation we extend is an opportunity for you to come. We will talk with you and help you with a spiritual commitment in your life.

Lord, this morning I pray that we would examine ourselves in this moment and that we would not think of how others need this message but that we would see that each of us needs it. Father, what would be real in us today would be the desire that we have more than anything else to live in a way that would please you and would show your mercy. So Father, right now, I pray you would have mercy upon us in this moment and that through your love and grace that people would be drawn to the Savior Jesus. For it is in his name that we pray together. Amen.

I want you to look up and I want you to stand up as you do. We are going to sing this chorus together, "Come Just as You Are." Pastors will be here to meet and to receive you. Encouragers and prayer partners will come and I want to ask you dear friends to lead the way. Prayer partners you be here that we can help those who come. Let's sing. You come.

Come just as you are. Hear the spirit call. Come just as you are. Come receive, come receive, come and live forever. Come just as you are. Hear the spirit call. Come just as you are. Come receive Christ the King.

Would you come just as you are today? Give yourself to Christ.

Be content to go forward into the future without seeing our own responsibility, to seek to bridge a relationship, and to share Christ. Lord, if that could happen even in this week, if it could somehow have effect even in next Sunday, that Lord you would let us come and gather here again with friends and neighbors on our side who need to know Christ. Oh God let your mercy so move us I pray.

Lord, for those here today and still struggling to know the mercy of Christ but somehow have just not seen it or received it, how I pray that they would be saved. I pray that they would know him. How I pray they would experience forgiveness in their life. Lord, thank you for today. But, oh God, as we look ahead, as we look to Easter, Lord use this week in our lives for service and next Sunday for victory for the kingdom of Christ. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Would you look up here just a moment? This Wednesday evening there will be a Seder Supper done for families over in our dining room. That will include children and students and adults. It is going to be a marvelous there on the eve of Passover to share in together. I want to encourage you to be a part of it. On Good Friday, two services noon and seven in the Chapel. Next Sunday morning, Easter morning, 9:00 a.m. (a new time) for the early service and then at 11:00. Those will be the two hours of worship. We will be together with the Easter Fest right in between. It is going to be a wonderful time. I hope you will be with us. 6:00 tonight we will be together.

Thank you so much again for coming today. God bless you.

Presented by David McKinley

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