

JUDGEMENT CALL : A SERIES OF DVD MESSAGES BY ANDY STANLEY

Message Two : "Double Standard", viewed at FBC on Sunday 24 May 2009

INTRODUCTION

Andy Stanley serves as senior pastor of North Point Ministries (www.northpoint.org). He and his wife Sandra, have two sons and the most delightful third child, a daughter.

This is a condensed version of the second of a four-part series by Andy Stanley about the confusing and often misunderstood topic of judging others.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

One of the most commonly held beliefs about the Bible is that it teaches us not to judge one another. But is this true?

Are we supposed to turn a blind eye to sin – or is it appropriate to confront others? Is it right that because God has forgiven those in the 'inner circle', we too should forgive and put up with anything and everything? If not, what guidelines does the bible provide for judging others? Do we have any business judging those outside the 'inner circle'?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

In 1 Corinthians : Chapter 5 verses 1 to 13 we find the following as it appears in the NIV version:

"1. It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 2. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 3. Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgement on the one who did this, just as if I were present. 4. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5. hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. 6. Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? 7. Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. 9. I have written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – 10. not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. 11. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer. With such a man do not even eat. 12. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13. God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

SETTING THE SCENE

Andy is concerned in this message with situations in which a member of our group of believers is known to be engaging in some activity or practice which offends against God and the scriptures and is about how we as Christians are required to respond to such a believer.

He gives a number of examples of situations in which our response is required to be judgemental and cites the example of Jesus who would, often in a very public way, denounce those who claimed to be on the side of God but who were involved in all manner of ungodly acts.

At the same time, Jesus was ready to embrace those, like Matthew and Zacchaeus who were also guilty of ungodly acts – but who did not profess to be part of God's people.

Christians tend to buy into the mindset that says: Do not be judgemental. But what one finds in the New Testament and in the life of Jesus is that there are two groups of people : one who should not be judged; and one who should be judged. We have got these two groups confused with the result that Christians tend to be very judgemental of people outside the church. And yet once you are inside the circle of faith, you can do just about anything. Those have been forgiven and there is no reason, so the logic goes, for us to be judgemental of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is exactly the opposite of what is taught in scripture and, Andy says, is one of the reasons we have such a bad reputation as believers because people feel judged by us. The truth is, we have no business judging those outside the faith and by doing so, only drive them away.

UNDERSTANDING PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

In the New Testament are two of the many letters that Paul wrote to the church he founded in Corinth. Andy deals with the passage above from one of these letters.

In this letter, we learn that Paul has received word that there is this really dysfunctional thing going on, of one of the members of the church who is sleeping with his step-mother. Even amongst the pagans this was viewed as unacceptable and yet the rest of the Christians who belonged to this church were tolerating this particular member's behaviour.

This was a situation where someone had adopted a lifestyle characterised by sin and who knew or ought to have known that it was contrary to the teachings of scripture. This was not a case of someone falling into sin who had confessed and resolved never to again do what he had been doing.

Paul says that, not only is this going on but the rest of the membership is behaving like they are proud of it! Instead, Paul says, this should have broken their hearts when they learnt about it and caused them to put this man out of their fellowship.

The tension, Andy explains, that exists in Paul's advice lies in the apparently opposing sentiments of the grief Paul felt would have been appropriate amongst the membership - and the reaction he advocated, of casting the offender out of their midst. Even if this is being judgemental, that is precisely how Paul felt they should be as Christians in these circumstances.

Assemble together, Paul says, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and, in His power, hand this man to Satan "so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved....".

The tension that is referred to above and that seems to exist between what Paul is advising should happen in the circumstances he is dealing with and, for instance, the chapter Paul writes in the same letter about the nature of love, often puts us at odds with God, Andy says. This is because we have bought into the simplistic notion that as Christians we should never sit in the seat of the judge. Paul says otherwise.

Paul uses the Greek word, which is often used in the Greek text and which means 'purpose', as in, 'what follows will explain the preceding portion' ; 'this is the purpose of my advising you as I have'. And so Paul goes on to explain his purpose as being to allow for the sinful nature of the man to be destroyed and his spirit saved. The reason he wants them to judge the man is because he cares so much about him. Once the full measure of his sin has broken him, he will come running back to the roots of his faith and to what he said at some point in his past he believed.

Paul knew that sin does not play fair. Sin is dangerous and is like a cancer that spreads. The consequences of sin is often the very thing that drives us back into a relationship with God. Paul's motivation was not punishment, but restoration. He knew that if we turn the man over to Satan – and we may never fully know what Paul meant by that – he would crash into the limits of this kind of behaviour and when he was down and broken and came crawling back, he should be accepted. Sometimes judging is the loving thing to do.

Paul goes on to say that, in addition to being in the best interests of the one who is cast out, it is also so that ' a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough'. This is a symbolic way of saying not only is his being in your group bad for him because he gets to work both sides and never faces the consequences of his sin and this elongates the process, but as long as you have him in your midst, it is also bad for you because a little bit of bad begins to work its way into the rest of the group.

Paul puts his teaching into perspective by reminding those to whom he is writing that Jesus Christ died because of our sin. So why would they embrace a Christian who knowingly embraces sin for which Christ died. That's why you have got to act and put him out, he says – not to punish him but to preserve him, and the church.

Paul clarifies that when he wrote in a (previous) letter that there should be no associating with sexually immoral people, Paul was not referring to people in the world who are immoral – or greedy or swindlers or idolaters. That would have been pointless because there are so many of those types of people in the world. He was saying that there should be no associating with these types of people who are in the church. You have no business judging those who are not Christians because there is no common ground or standard to judge them by. I have no business, Paul says, judging those outside the church. It is God who will judge those outside. If you do so, you will be playing God.

Christians are rather prone to doing just that and then wondering why the outsiders do not want to have anything to do with the Church. Paul says we need to take care of business at home and leave the outsiders to God.

LESSONS FOR THE LEARNING

1. Christians are supposed to judge each other. We can't celebrate sin and worship the Saviour at the same time.
2. Outsiders should not experience us judging them.
3. This is not a lesson for family but for the Church. When family broach sin, it is not an emotionally neutral subject. This principle would be used to punish, not restore. As long as this is seen as a way to punish out of anger, you have a log in your eye and need to look in the mirror rather than to try to remove the sawdust from the eye of someone in your family.
4. This is not about punish but about restore, protect. This is not about I don't like you but about I love you so much, I'm prepared to risk offending you by judging you. If these principles energise you, there's a problem. Our emotion should be a broken heart for the person we feel should be judged.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. 1 Cor. 5 : 1 – 5
 What would have been the result if the church had continued to ignore this man's behaviour?
2. What are the consequences when we don't judge our fellow Christians?
3. I Cor. 5 : 9 – 11
 As a Christian, what does it look like to judge another Christian?
4. What is the goal of judging other Christians?
5. 1 Cor. 5 : 12 – 13
 Why are there two different standards for judging – one for Christians and one for those who are not Christians?
6. What is usually the result when Christians attempt to judge those outside the church?